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*Manuals of Religious Instruction
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EDITED BY

JOHN PILKINGTON NORRIS, M.A.

CANON OF BRISTOL

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MANUALS OF
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CANON OF BRISTOL

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THE
OLD TESTAMENT

BY
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SECOND YEAR'S COURSE



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE portions of the Old Testament to be read with this part of the Manual are the Books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, chapters i. to xi., 1 Chronicles, chapters x. to the end, and 2 Chronicles, chapters i. to ix.

LESSON I.

JOSHUA AND THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN.

JOSHUA, the man chosen by God to succeed Moses as the leader of the Israelites, must have been born towards the close of the long captivity in Egypt, during the darkest and heaviest gloom of that period, when "the Children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage." He was distinguished by the qualities most necessary in a soldier—courage, simplicity and forethought, and is first brought before us as the commander of the Israelites at the battle of Rephidim.¹ From this time we hear of him as "the minister of Moses." As he descends from the Mount, and hears the noise of the people, his thought is at once that of a soldier: "There is a noise of war in the camp;"² and when Eldad and Medad prophesy, as he thinks out of due order, his love of discipline and of obedience to the leader is shocked. With something of the spirit afterwards shown by those "sons of thunder," who ministered to a greater Leader, Joshua exclaims, "My Lord Moses, forbid them."³ Sent by Moses with others to spy out the land, he and Caleb alone dare to resist

¹ Exod. xvii. 10.

² Exod. xxxii. 17.

³ Numb. xi. 28.

the evil report brought by the others, and to incur the risk of stoning.

Such was the man, in his earlier years, who was called by God to so great a work, that in some respects it may be thought greater even than that of Moses. For all the enthusiasm caused by the near remembrance of Egyptian bondage, and of the triumph of that day when the waters overwhelmed their enemies, must have greatly passed away. It was a new generation which Joshua was to lead into Canaan, a people who had grown up in the wilderness, and almost lost the ordinances of God, for they were uncircumcised, and therefore unable to keep the Passover. The task seemed hard enough. What were the special means by which Joshua was to accomplish it?

His natural endowments are far more those of the soldier than of the man of learning, and for this very reason, perhaps, we do not find in him that shrinking from the task imposed, so deeply felt by Moses. To aid him in his work, he has the training of his master, the reiterated command, "Be strong, and very courageous," certain direct intimations from God, with at least one distinct appearance of the Divine Presence, and above all, "the book of the law." Joshua is the first person to whom "the book" is continually presented as a guide in life; he is the first of a long race of successors, whether Jewish or Christian, whose course in this life has been modified and directed by the written Word. "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua," "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night,"—words re-echoed by Joshua in his old age when he charged

the elders of Israel, "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses."¹

Moreover, his change of name from Hoshea (Salvation) to Joshua (God the Saviour) taught him that in the strength of God, and not in his own, the people would be saved. Yet he could not have understood all that was bound up in that name, now familiar to us, and to all ages, under its Greek form—JESUS.²

Thus aided and strengthened and solemnly set apart by God, Joshua accepted, without one word of shrinking or of doubt, the post of leader of the people. He began his preparations with soldierly forethought; prepared victuals, sent out spies to learn the state of the country, and marched the people down to Jordan, which now having overflowed its banks, lay broad, and apparently impassable, before the Israelites.

We may imagine with what feelings Joshua surveyed the Jordan the night before he crossed it; it was now at its greatest width, lighted by the full Passover moon, and we can fancy how it may have reminded him of the river of Egypt which he had seen in his youth. Only he and Caleb had ever seen such a sight before. The multitude, miraculously aided by God, pass this seemingly impassable river, they are circumcised, and again they celebrate the Passover, while the manna, their food while wandering and unsettled, ceases. Now, too, Joshua is cheered by a heavenly Visitant, the Captain of the Lord's host,

¹ Exod. xvii. 14; Josh. i. 8, xxiii. 6.

² Under this form of the name Joshua is always mentioned in the New Testament: Acts vii. 45; Heb. iv. 8.

to Whom, as Abraham at the tent-door and Moses at the burning bush, he does homage.

The conquest of Palestine, under the leadership of Joshua, may be divided into three stages. The first of these placed the southern part of the valley of Jordan in the hands of the invaders. A camp was formed at Gilgal, and the march continued to Jericho, whose walls miraculously fell before these desert wanderers, who could never before have beheld a fortified city.

Such a conquest as this taught the lesson so often re-echoed by the best and truest spirits among them: "They gat not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them."¹ "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days."

This faith, however, could only show itself by obedience; and the check which the invading host met with before Ai was caused by forgetfulness of this. To Achan the spoils of a conquered city might seem of right to belong to the conquerors, and the distinction made between precious things kept for the treasury of the Lord,² and the same things kept for private use, appeared perhaps to him useless, but in disobeying God's command he "transgressed the covenant of the Lord."³ It was only after his death, and the utter destruction of "the accursed thing," that the people could again conquer. Ai captured, Joshua, obedient to the command of Moses, read the Law, and proclaimed the blessings and cursings from Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. From thence he returns to the

¹ Psa. xlv. 3.

² Josh. vi. 19.

³ Josh. vii. 15.

camp at Gilgal, and the first stage of the conquest is ended.

The second was opened by an aggressive move on the part of the Canaanites ; the different tribes combining together, commenced the attack by falling on the Gibeonites, who had allied themselves with the invaders. In passing, we should remark the faith and truth with which the promise made by Joshua and the elders was kept, though won from them by deceit. At once they marched from Gilgal to the relief of the besieged city, and then ensued the great battle of Beth-horon, which has been truly called one of the decisive battles of the world. In it we recognise not only the victory of the Israelites over the Canaanites, but of faith over evil, of the Church over the world. Aided again by God, Who sent a mighty hailstorm in the faces of their foe, "the people avenged themselves upon their enemies." Long did they remember the day ; and they sang in after years how Joshua stood and prayed¹—

"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon !
And thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon !
And the sun stood still,
And the moon stayed,
Until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies."

The whole of the centre and south of Palestine, with all the towns, fell into the hands of the invaders. Once more the Israelites returned to the camp at Gilgal, and so ended the second stage of the conquest.

Again, the third and last stage is brought about by a league formed among the Canaanitish tribes. The

¹ The Book of Jasher, from which this fragment of poetry is taken, was probably a collection of national odes, and is referred to again (2 Sam. i. 18) as containing the dirge composed by David over Saul and Jonathan.

course of the struggle reminds us somewhat of the Norman conquest of our own land. The men of Sussex and Kent were conquered first; the men of Devon at another time; those of Lincoln and East Anglia at yet others; and all rose in arms at such different times, that the resistance assumed rather the appearance of a series of rebellions than of a national defence. So it was also in Canaan at the time of Joshua. The south and centre having been subdued, the northern tribes rose in arms.

The Jordan, as it flows down from Lebanon towards the Dead Sea, passes through two lakes, the Lake or Waters of Merom,¹ and the Sea of Galilee, hallowed for all time by most sacred memories. Near the former of these, perhaps on its shores (not then, probably, so impassable from the thick jungle of reeds as they are now), was assembled the largest army that the Israelites had yet encountered. It was under the command of the king of Hazor, who bore the name of Jabin, which appears to have been a special appellation of those kings, like that of Pharaoh in Egypt. The army possessed also a great number of horses and chariots, which were entirely new to the Israelites, who fought on foot. A special encouragement was therefore given by God to Joshua, "Be not afraid because of them." By a rapid and sudden march, Joshua and his "people of war" fell on the Canaanitish host, and utterly defeated them, chasing them far northwards, and specially destroying, as God had commanded, the dreaded horses and chariots. After this battle, Hazor was burnt, and all the cities of the confederate kings taken. Thus ends the third and last stage of Joshua's conquest.

¹ Josh. xi. 7.

LESSON II.

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE TRIBES.

MUCH yet remained to be done before it could be said that the work was accomplished, and that Israel had truly entered upon God's heritage. It would appear that many of the towns once taken by the Israelites were afterwards re-occupied by their former inhabitants. Of these Hebron, Jerusalem, and Bethel are examples. In many other parts of the land the Canaanites still dwelt, the task of driving them out was hard, and the Israelites seem quickly to have lost all lively sense of their mission from God as exterminators of evil. While Joshua lived, however, it was not so.

"Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua,"¹ and the activity of the great soldier never relaxed. He commenced at once the division of the land among the tribes; but it is characteristic of his history that though apparently the only commander in war, in this work of dividing the land Joshua was associated with Eleazar the high-priest and the other elders.² We have compared the conquest of Canaan to that of England by the Normans. The description

¹ Josh. xxiv. 31.

² Josh. xix. 51.

of the division of the land given in the book of Joshua has also been likened to a great work of the Norman conqueror, and has been called "the Domesday Book of Palestine."

Two methods seem to have been employed in the division of the land ; the one an apportionment by lot of so much land given as by the whole state to an individual tribe, the other a permission granted by Joshua to certain chiefs to take possession of special conquests made by themselves. To this last method belongs the grant of Hebron to Caleb, the only contemporary of Joshua, and the first hero of the great tribe of Judah, that tribe, which rising gradually in importance through the sacred history, has left its name in constant use among us in the word "Jew." In the south of Palestine Judah had his inheritance ; it was the land most abounding in vineyards, and thus most fit for that tribe of whom Jacob had spoken as "binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine." Judah also possessed the mountains known to us in the New Testament as "the hill country of Judæa," the "wilderness" by the shores of the Dead Sea and the sea coast, where, however, dwelt the Philistines. South of Judah, Simeon had the border land of Palestine, including Abraham's former dwelling, Beersheba. To Benjamin was given a small portion north of Judah, including Jericho and the first conquests, and the as yet unconquered town of Jerusalem. Dan had his portion on the sea coast, afterwards enlarged by an addition in the north. The great tribe of Ephraim, with Issachar and one half of Manasseh, possessed the centre, while the north was divided between Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. East of the Jordan, Reuben,

Gad, and the other half of Manasseh received the portion given them by Moses. They had loyally kept the promise they had made: first of all the tribes they had marched over Jordan, they had obeyed Joshua in all that he commanded, and now with his blessing he dismissed them to that pastoral land, which they had desired.

But the Israelites were not only to be a nation, but also a Church, a people separate from others, because they alone possessed the true knowledge of God. From the single patriarch Abraham, from the one family of Jacob, from the shepherds and slaves of Egypt, and the wandering tribes of the desert, the chosen people of God has become a settled nation; and now it must be separated from the evil around, and confirmed in the true worship.

The first of these purposes—the separation of the chosen people—would have been accomplished had the Israelites fulfilled God's command, and thoroughly exterminated the Canaanites. The judgment on the Canaanites had been delayed for many years; to Abraham God had said, "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."¹ Since then they seem to have "filled up the measure of their fathers," and as their very worship and sacred rites were licentious and sensual, their very neighbourhood became contaminating. Thus it was that the Israelites, not perfectly fulfilling God's command, quickly fell into the same impure idolatry.

For the establishment of the true worship Joshua took means in his lifetime. The priestly caste was kept distinct: "to the Levites he gave none inheri-

¹ Gen. xv. 16.

tance;" "the Lord God of Israel was their inheritance." In Shiloh, within the boundary of his own central tribe of Ephraim, he set up the tabernacle made by Moses, with the ark of God, and sanctifying what might seem a mere affair of worldly business, he cast the lots for the inheritance "in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation."¹

As the time drew near when the aged leader of the people was to be taken from them, he ceased not to urge on them the full accomplishment of the will of God; the spirit of the soldier still breathes through all he says: "If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood country and cut down for thyself . . . if Mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee."² "How long are ye slack to go to possess the land?"³ And at the last he twice assembled the people to recount to them God's mercies, to warn them of the dangers of contact with "these nations, these that remain among you," and to renew solemnly the covenant between them and God. "Put away," he said, "the strange gods which are among you." Once more they solemnly chose Jehovah for their God, and Joshua, as his manner was, raised a stone in remembrance and as a witness. His death followed soon after. The upright soldier, the second leader of the people, the last survivor of the Exodus, passed away, but so far as it lay in his hands his work was accomplished. The imperfect fulfilment of God's will was due to no neglect of his; he was able even to say when he dismissed the Trans-Jordanic tribes, "The Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren;"⁴ and he had truly brought the people from

¹ Josh. xix. 51.

³ Josh. xviii. 3.

² Josh. xvii. 15.

⁴ Josh. xxii. 4.

the restless wanderings of the wilderness, through battles and struggles, to the Promised Land and a settled habitation. And yet their after history tells that it was far from perfect rest or peace that they inherited. Constant wars, frequent bondage and serving of their enemies, mark their troubled story until the time of the great Captivity. For that Promised Land was but a type of perfect rest, and from the imperfection of that type is taught an early longing for immortality. "If Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day."¹ "But now, they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."² "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."³

¹ Heb. iv. 8.

² Heb. xi. 16.

³ Heb. iv. 9.

LESSON III.

THE JUDGES OF THE SOUTHERN TRIBES.

AFTER the death of Joshua the children of Israel were governed by Judges until the time of the establishment of the Monarchy. How long this period lasted it is impossible now to say with anything like certainty. But we must remember that the history is fragmentary ; at one time it tells us of what was happening among the Danites and the Philistines on the sea coast, at another of the wars of the northern tribes, at another of those east of the Jordan. We must remember that the "rests of the land" and the servitudes by no means extended over the whole of Palestine, and that they probably often coincided in point of time. Thus, while one tribe rested or triumphed over its enemies, another might be in bondage. The Judges also never appear to have borne rule over all the tribes as Joshua did, but at the most over their own and the surrounding ones. It is clear that during such a time of unsettled, changing government, the danger threatening the nation must have been disunion. Instead of becoming one people and one Church, they were in danger of falling asunder into at least some four or five sections, with different leaders,

different interests, and at last even different forms of worship. To protect them from this danger and incline them to union, they had, first, the reiterated command to separate themselves from the surrounding nations, and, second, the common centre of worship in the tabernacle raised at Shiloh. To this all Israelites were bound to go up three times a year to keep the feasts, and we can conceive of no better mode of producing a feeling of union than this constant meeting of men of different tribes at one place for one worship, coupled with a strong feeling of separation from all other people. So separated from the heathen, and so worshipping the one God, they must feel themselves one people, and realize that they had but one king, Jehovah. But they failed to learn this grand lesson of unity ; first, because they did not keep themselves wholly separate from the Canaanites, and secondly because the wars and unsettled state which this disobedience brought upon them undoubtedly prevented the regular going up of all to worship at Shiloh. Accordingly the danger of utter disunion became so great, that they gave up at last all hope of rising to this great ideal, and asked for an earthly king, that they might be one people under him. The whole history of this intervening period between the first conquest under Joshua and the time of Samuel is evidently a collection of narratives,—not one continuous narrative. It will be more convenient therefore, instead of going straight through the Book of Judges, to take the tribes by groups, according to the parts of the country they inhabited.

The Southern Tribes.

The most southern tribe was SIMEON. Joined with Judah,¹ this tribe subdued the southern Canaanites, but its members did not "multiply, like to the children of Judah."² The great tribe of JUDAH possessed the country immediately north of the Simeonites, and seem almost from the first to have been isolated from the rest of Israel. From among them came the first of the Judges. Othniel, the son of Kenaz, was of kin to Caleb, and had married his daughter Achsah, and thus may have been the man of greatest importance in the tribe. As the conqueror of Chushan-rishathaim he gained a yet greater name.³ This is the first recorded foreign invasion of the land after the coming of the Israelites, and was apparently a Mesopotamian or Aramæan⁴ invasion of the south. Othniel, the deliverer, became the judge of the people, uniting, as the other judges did, the office of judge with that of military leader.⁵ "He judged Israel, and went out to war." Of all the judges alike, it is said that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon them," and enabled them to judge. So sacred was the office held to be, and so divine the power given, that the judges of a later day are even sometimes spoken of as "gods."⁶ After the wars of Othniel we hear of no more victories gained by the tribe of Judah. Its history is mainly now of a peaceful character.

The Book of Ruth, the story of one family of Judah,

¹ Judg. i. 3.

² 1 Chron. iv. 27.

³ Judg. iii. 8, 9.

⁴ Aram-naharaim (the highland country between the two rivers, *i.e.* Tigris and Euphrates) was the country of Nahor (Gen. xxiv. 10, A. V. "Mesopotamia"), and is called also Padan-Aram (Gen. xxv. 20).

⁵ It is worthy of remark that neither Othniel nor any other judge, except Eli, was of the tribe of Levi.

⁶ Psa. lxxxii. 1, 6.

is really an episode belonging to the Book of Judges. We cannot fix the time of that famine which caused Elimelech, with his wife and sons, to leave Bethlehem-Judah, and travel away to those mountains of Moab which are so clearly seen from Jerusalem, across the deep Jordan valley. There, in the land of Moab, took place that marriage of Mahlon with Ruth the Moabitess, which, though contrary to the law, was surely blessed abundantly by God, whether from regard to the characters of those concerned, or in consideration of their exiled condition. The story is familiar to us all, yet it is ever new, and affords ever fresh lessons which may be applied to the present daily life of England. Still, even now, we recognise Boaz, "the mighty man of wealth," in his generosity and care for his dependants, as the best pattern for the farmer or employer of labour; still we recognise in the modesty and humility of Ruth a lovely example to the gleaner or to those whom we too sadly call "the field-hands." But in truth Ruth is not only an example of these gentler virtues; she combines with them a courage which led her to leave her own country and kinsfolk, and to brave what might have been the disdain of others, and a steadfast cleaving not only to her husband's mother, but to her husband's God.

Was the reward given to so much faith and piety only a happy marriage, a wealthy home, and a name among the people of the tribe of Judah? Not only this, though this was much. Once more in the sacred volume we meet the name of Ruth, not now in the Old Testament but in the New. St. Matthew tells us, "Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat

Obed of Ruth."¹ How many thoughts do these few words supply us with! Taken back to the first conquest, we remember the courage and the kindness of her who hid the spies, and who was the first in Jericho to declare "the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and in earth beneath,"—example henceforth to the Church of Christ of faith and of its operation through works.² Of Rahab, the earlier writer tells us: "She dwelleth in Israel even unto this day;" the later shows her to us as the wife of Salmon, son of Nahshon, "captain of the children of Judah,"³ and the mother of Boaz. And thus Rahab of Jericho and Ruth the Moabitess have their names for ever written among the ancestors of David and of David's greater Son, the promised "Seed of the woman." First in this story we begin to take an interest in Bethlehem, "the House of David," and in the corn-fields where Ruth gleaned, and in it we have "the first appearance on the scene of what may by anticipation be called even then the Holy Family."⁴

To the north of Judah was established the tribe of BENJAMIN, the smallest of all the tribes, which occupied the most hilly part of Palestine and the chief of the passes that give entrance either from the Jordan valley on the east, or the maritime plain on the west into the interior of the country. In the possession of Benjamin were many renowned cities, such as Bethel and Mizpeh, to which the Tabernacle (with the Ark) appears to have been occasionally moved from Shiloh, and which thus acquired a sacred character. The site of the ruined Jericho (the City of Palm-trees)

¹ Matt. i. 5.² Comp. Heb. xi. 31; James ii. 25.³ Numb. ii. 3.⁴ Stanley, *Jewish Church*, i. 305.

was also within the border of Benjamin, while Jerusalem (still in the possession of the Jebusites) lay as a debateable ground between that tribe and Judah. The character of the tribe of Benjamin appears to have been fierce and obstinate, thus perhaps fulfilling the prophecy of Jacob, "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf."¹ Many notices shew us that the men of this tribe were renowned as archers, and by a special dexterity in slinging stones with their left hand.² Their history in the Book of Judges is one of mingled shame, defeat and triumph. They failed on their first settlement in dislodging the Jebusites from Jerusalem ;³ and they rapidly seem to have fallen into a wild, lawless condition. The terrible punishment which their refusal to give up the guilty men of Gibeah brought on them took place evidently in the early days of the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan.

The reasons for assigning an *early* date to this part of the narrative are the following :—In the times spoken of in the twentieth chapter of Judges, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the high-priest, is still alive, and the unanimity of the people marks a very early period. "The congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead,"⁴ that is, from the Danite settlement in the extreme north to the southern tribe of Simeon, within whose border Beersheba lay, with the tribes who had their inheritance on the other side of Jordan. It seems almost the only time when such a gathering took place, and it could not have been very long after the conquest. Although it is the first *civil* war, the first time that Israelite fought

¹ Gen. xlix. 27.³ Judges i. 21.² 1 Chron. viii. 40, xii. 2 ; Judges xx. 16. *⁴ Judges xx. 1.

against Israelite, yet the expressions used shew a stronger national feeling than we find afterwards. After the destruction of the Benjamites the sorrow of the people is all directed to the breaking up of the commonwealth of Israel.¹ "They said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel." With this story we part with the last of the names familiar to us in the preceding history, Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron. In the determination to "put away evil from Israel" we recognise the leadership of him who "was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel;"² in the strong feeling that the loss of one was a *breach* in the tribes of Israel, we hear again the voice of him who said, "Seeing ye rebel to-day against the Lord, to-morrow He will be wroth with the *whole* congregation of Israel."³

We may perhaps see the consequences of this destruction of the Benjamites in the defenceless condition of the tribe when the invasion of the Moabites took place.⁴ Eglon, king of Moab, at the head of a confederacy of various peoples from the east of the Jordan, crossed the river and established himself in a settlement or camp at "the City of palm trees," on the site of the ruined Jericho. From thence they appear to have overrun and oppressed the neighbouring country, that is the land of Benjamin and the adjoining tribe of Ephraim. The children of Israel seem for a time to have bowed to this oppression, and striven to purchase peace by the payment of a tribute. They were rescued from this state of servitude by the sudden and rapid vengeance taken on Eglon and his Moabites by Ehud.

¹ Judges xxi. 3, 15. ² Numb. xxv. 13. ³ Josh. xxii. 18. ⁴ Judges iii.

Like Othniel, Ehud is called "a deliverer," and he is the first of the heroes of the tribe of Benjamin. The mingled courage and craft with which he achieves the death of Eglon, the rapidity of his movements, the summons from Mount Ephraim (which again seems to intimate the deserted state of the land of Benjamin), the sudden seizing of the fords of the Jordan and cutting off of the flight of the Moabites, all present to us a clear picture of the success of the one "left-handed" Benjaminite against the gigantic king and his followers.

And here a question arises which will often occur to us in reading these histories. Could a victory obtained by so much guile and carried out with so much cruelty be a rightful deliverance of God's people? In answering this question we must, as has been said, distinguish clearly between "God's providential government of the world and God's moral law."

It does not at all follow that because Ehud's act brought deliverance to Israel, therefore it was righteous in itself, for God can bring good out of evil, and we must remember that the greatest crime ever recorded, the betrayal of our Blessed Lord, helped to bring about the deliverance of all mankind from the bondage of sin. But if we turn to the moral law alone, and ask "Was Ehud's act in accordance with that?" we must again distinguish between the moral law as he knew it, and the moral law as explained to Christians. We have no right to judge such acts by our own knowledge, but should try them by the amount of knowledge vouchsafed at that time. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy."¹ *That* was Ehud's law, *not* those blessed

¹ Matt. v.

words that follow: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies." He lived in an age when "there was no king in Israel," and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes;" no settled law, but a necessity for self-defence, or, as we should say, taking the law into one's own hands. He shewed perhaps the amount of virtue which it was possible for him to attain to; he was willing to risk his own life for the deliverance of God's Israel, and while he lived he restrained the people from idolatry.¹ For the rest, he would probably no more have thought that the command "Thou shalt not kill" forbade Eglon's death than that it forbade the battle of Beth-horon. If a purer and clearer light has been given to us, let us never forget that greater light is always accompanied by greater responsibility. "To whom men have committed much of him they will ask the more."²

¹ Judges iv. 1.

² Luke xii. 48.

LESSON IV.

THE JUDGES OF THE NORTHERN AND CENTRAL TRIBES.

(1.) *The Northern Tribes.*

FOUR tribes occupied the North of Palestine. Of these NAPHTALI was the most northern, and possessed the forests and high hills bordering on Lebanon. ASHER possessed the sea-coast. ZEBULUN lay south of Naphtali, and together with it surrounded the western shores of the Sea of Galilee, while IS-SACHAR was south again of Zebulun, and appears to have divided with it the possession of the great plain of Jezreel and of the mountain of Tabor. The power of the northern Canaanites had been crushed for a time by Joshua at the battle of Merom; but many towns were left still in their possession, and with reinforcements pouring in, probably from Phœnicia, we can well understand how they gathered strength again. They appear to have rebuilt Hazor, and once more to have been governed by a king who bore the hereditary name of Jabin. While the Moabites oppressed the central part of Palestine, these northern Canaanites probably increased in power and gradually enslaved the northern tribes. A bondage second only to that of

Egypt ensued. Once more "the children of Israel cried unto the Lord ;" once more they were "mightily oppressed." Skilful in arts, the Canaanites again, as in the time of Joshua, were strong in horses and chariots, while they had taken care to disarm those whom they had enslaved.¹ The people dare no longer venture to walk on the highways, nor the judges to do justice in the gates. In this state of low depression, none arose from among the northern tribes to deliver from the oppressors, as Moses from the Egyptians.

One chief indeed, Barak (his name means "lightning") seems to have been already renowned in Naphtali, but even he needed a call to rouse him to the work of patriotism. This call came from the voice of a woman. Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth, belonged to Ephraim, and had her home under a palm tree in Mount Ephraim, but she retained enough of national feeling to perceive that all Israel must unite as in the days of the first march into Canaan, and that their true bond of union was in the leadership of Jehovah.² It is characteristic of the Sacred History, that from time to time we see God's special messages and lessons to the world conveyed through women as well as men. Already we see the working of that truth afterwards proclaimed, that with Him "there is neither male nor female."³ Deborah resembles Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses, in her prophetic gifts and high poetic utterances. In her gift of judgment, to receive which the children of Israel came up to her, she reminds us more of Huldah, to whose dwelling in the college the King of Judah in after years sent to inquire. From her sanctuary in Mount Ephraim, Deborah sends

¹ s v. 8.² Judges iv. 6, 7, 14, v. 4.³ Gal. iii. 28.

for Barak : with all the fervour and power of her nature she urges him to a revolt against the Canaanitish oppression ; she fixes the time and place of the resistance ; urges him to collect his own kindred of Naphtali and Zebulun ; and when he seems to fear and doubt, promises to go with him. With the influence given her by her office of judge and her recognised position as "a mother in Israel," she strove to band together all Israel, and to repeat again the story of the first conquest. But already the national feeling was dying out : it was impossible to rouse those, who were at any distance from the pressure of the danger, to resist it. "Gilead (that is, Gad and half Manasseh) abode beyond Jordan ;" Reuben apparently debated the matter, but, ever "unstable as water," weakly remained among his sheepfolds ; Dan remained in his ships ; and Asher, though situated in the north, "continued on the sea-shore ;" probably because already in alliance with the invaders. "The Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites,"¹ and no judge or mighty man ever sprung from them. Even among those tribes who rose, one town was conspicuous for its refusal to come, as the prophetess indignantly expresses it, "to the help of the Lord against the mighty."²

If unsuccessful in animating the whole, Deborah however inspired a great part of the country to rise in the national defence.

To those gallant ten thousand of Naphtali and Zebulun, whose praise she afterwards celebrated, the prophetess added "a root out of Ephraim," certain governors and princes from western Manasseh and Issachar, and even some helpers from the small though

¹ Judges i. 32.

² Judges v. 23.

ever warlike tribe of Benjamin. All assembled on Mount Tabor, and thence "on foot" rushed down upon the Canaanitish host, which, strong in its position near the towns of Megiddo and Taanach (from which their countrymen had never been dislodged),¹ awaited them with nine hundred chariots of iron in the plain of Jezreel.

The combat seemed most unequal, but it was the Lord Who fought for "the avenging of Israel," and the issue was not long uncertain. A storm arose apparently during the battle; the rising of the river Kishon, swelled by rain, rendered useless the heavy iron chariots, and soon all became confusion in the oppressor's army. Sisera himself fled away on foot, leaving his people to utter destruction before the sword of Barak. He fled, but his mighty and long oppression was not to go unpunished. The terrible story of his end is known to all of us, his last hope of finding refuge among the wandering Kenites, and his death by the hand of a woman. These Kenites were descendants of Moses' brother-in-law Hobab,² to whom Moses had extended the privileges of the Lord's people. They probably considered themselves as part of the chosen people, though they had not given up their wandering habits or their tent life. A branch of them, with Heber and Jael at their head, had journeyed to the north of Naphtali. There they found a heavy oppression weighing on their Israelitish brethren, and then Jael with her own hand destroyed the oppressor. Heber had indeed made peace with the Canaanite, and some of his tribe seem

¹ Judges i. 27.

² Numb. x. 29 32; Judges i. 16, v. 6, iv. 11. The word translated in our Bible "father-in-law" signifies really any relation by marriage.

to have betrayed the movements of Deborah and Barak ; but it is clear from Jael's address to Barak that she already knew him well as the Israelitish chief, and that her allegiance to the God of Israel had never been shaken. Barak's faith had been tried by the apparent insufficiency of the means at his command, and by Deborah's assurance that the honour of the day would not be his ; but it was not for his own honour that he had striven, and though brought about by a woman, he could "rejoice when he saw the vengeance." Of Jael's deed we must judge (as of Ehud's) by the light of such knowledge as she, one of the wandering "women of the tent," possessed. A great thinker of modern times has said : "The spirit of the commendation of Jael is that God allows largely for ignorance where He finds sincerity ; that they who serve Him honestly up to the measure of their knowledge are, according to the general course of His Providence, encouraged and blessed ; that they whose eyes and hearts are still fixed on duty, and not on self, are plainly that smoking flax which He will not quench, but cherish rather until it be blown into a flame."

(2.) The Central Tribes.

The centre of Palestine was occupied by the house of Joseph. Bordering on Benjamin northward, the great tribe of EPHRAIM had claimed, and claimed with reason, the whole centre of the land. Within their border lay Shiloh (the place where God had put His name), Shechem, where were buried the bones of Joseph, the ancestor of the tribe, and Timnath-Serah,

where lay their great hero Joshua. Northward again was half the brother tribe of MANASSEH, in whose possession was the pass opening into the plain of Jezreel from the east. Here Joseph inherited the blessings of his father, "unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills,"¹ and here in close neighbourhood dwelt "the ten thousands of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh."² Ephraim might well have been the centre and rallying-point for all the tribes of Israel; but mighty and powerful as it was, it never strove to occupy such a position. From the first, it is clear that Shiloh, the centre of worship, was not the centre or capital of the tribe; Shechem instead was their great and favourite city, from which, however, they did not apparently utterly dislodge the Canaanites. "Mingled among the heathen, they learned their works, and they served their idols, which were a snare unto them."³ Early in their history the Ephraimites are said to have "turned themselves back in the day of battle;"⁴ it was but "a root" of them that followed their own prophetess Deborah, and from that time we constantly find them jealous of others and complaining of their opportunities for distinguishing themselves as a tribe, rather than striving for the unity of the nation, or rejoicing in the success of all. The time when they might have headed this national feeling at length passed away; "the Lord refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe Ephraim," and their after history is singularly connected with the schisms of their country both in Church and State. From the later books of the Bible we know that it was they who led the revolt against the house of

¹ Gen. xlix. 26.² Deut. xxxiii. 17.³ Ps. cvi. 35⁴ Ps. lxxviii. 9.

David, and who for the most part composed the rival kingdom of Israel ; it was in their land that the rival worship of the Samaritans was established, and continues even to this day.

In MANASSEH idolatry had as great or even greater hold upon the people. The father of their great judge and hero, Gideon, had raised an altar to Baal and a figure of Ashtoreth,¹ two false gods of the Canaanites. On the backsliding Israelites came a heavy judgment from God. The Midianites, with other desert tribes, came up periodically from the other side of Jordan and overspread the whole centre of the land. It was a yearly visitation, and as at the present day in Palestine the fear of the wandering Bedouins makes much cultivation of the country useless, so then the crops which Israel had sown were all swept off by the invaders. At length this servitude was resisted, and a deliverer raised up from the families of Manasseh. Gideon's faith is very striking. At the risk of his own life he overthrows the altar of Baal, and like Elijah offers a burnt-offering, while his father exclaims, "Will ye plead for Baal? . . . if he be a god, let him plead for himself." Like Moses, Gideon trembles at the great task given him: "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel?" But though he asks for signs, it is not as a proof of God's power, but to assure himself that God *has* spoken, and that he is not being led by his own imagination.² When next the dreaded yearly invasion takes place Gideon prepares to resist ; he who before thought only of hiding the corn in the wine-press now summons the people together. As is said of all the

¹ Such seems the best explanation of the word translated "grove" in Judges vi. 25.

² Judges vi. 36.

judges, "the Spirit of the Lord" came upon him, and the people who had been hiding in dens and caves, and long without a leader, are gathered to him. First the men of his own city, then all of his own tribe, come at the sound of his trumpet; they are joined by the most northern tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali, ready, as before under Barak, to put their lives in jeopardy; and even by Asher, stung perhaps by the reproaches of Deborah, or moved by the destructive nature of the invasion. In the history which follows we have the same lesson taught as in the first taking of Jericho under Joshua. Every precaution is taken to teach the people that it is not in their own strength that they conquer; their number is diminished till it seems out of all proportion to those opposed to them, and, as before, it is by the sound of the trumpets and the shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" that the victory is won. Anxious to render it complete, Gideon sends to the Ephraimites to repeat the stratagem of Ehud with the Moabites, and seize the fords of Jordan, and so prevent the escape of the invaders. This is done; but the jealousy of the great tribe breaks out in their anger with Gideon even at such a moment. In his answer we see a remarkable example of forbearance and gentleness: he would not suffer this great day of the Lord to be marred by strife and recrimination. He continues his track of the Midianites on the other side of Jordan, "faint, yet pursuing,"—words which, describing mingled exhaustion and determination, have seemed to many an apt description of a Christian's warfare. At length the remainder of the great host is overtaken, final victory is gained, and Zebah and Zalmunna, the head chiefs, perish, as their inferior princes Oreb

and Zeeb had done before. The success was complete; we hear no more of Midianite invasions: "they lifted up their heads no more."¹ The triumph of that day was long associated with the northern victory of Barak :

"Do unto them as unto the Midianites ; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison :

Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb : yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna."²

The immediate result of Gideon's great deliverance was, that the men he had led to victory desired him to be their king. They were falling more and more away from the perfect pattern set before them of a kingdom ruled only by God ; they raised no song like Deborah to praise Jehovah for the avenging of Israel, but, weary of discords among themselves and of constant invasions of a foreign foe, they said to Gideon, "Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also." They asked, in short, for an hereditary monarchy. It was the first cry of that desire to be like the nations around, which afterwards became too strong for Samuel to resist. But Gideon's true faith rose above such a desire, even though made in a form so flattering to his pride. His answer is one of the last protests against it, one of the last endeavours to realize the kingdom as it should have been. "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you : the Lord shall rule over you." Thus nobly did the deliverer refuse the unworthy proffer which his son Abimelech afterwards sought for, or, to use the figurative language of the first Hebrew parable, thus did the olive-tree, the fig, and the vine decline that which the worthless bramble accepted.³ It

¹ Judges viii. 28.

² Psa. lxxxiii. 9, 11.

³ Judges ix. 8-15.

is sad to remember that the history of Gideon does not end here. Jealous perhaps of Shiloh and of Ephraim, he seems to have established an unauthorized and rival worship at Ophrah; there he lived with something of the state of a king, though he would not hold the office. He is the first great instance of one who indulged in excessive polygamy; and in the massacre of his sons, related in the ninth chapter of Judges, we see the bitter result which then, as has so often since, followed upon it. But if Gideon failed in these matters, he yet stands high among those who judged Israel. Nowhere can we find among them a more courageous and prompt following of God's command, a more prudent avoidance of strife, or a more noble faith in the government of Jehovah. Great in all these things, he is worthy to stand first in the list of those of whom the Apostle says that the time would fail him to tell of their faith, who "out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."¹

¹ Heb. xi. 32, 34.

LESSON V.

THE JUDGES OF THE TRIBES EAST OF JORDAN AND ON THE WESTERN COAST.

(1.) *The Trans-Jordanic Tribes.*

THE two tribes of REUBEN and GAD, and half the tribe of MANASSEH, received their portion east of the Jordan; their country was more beautiful and more fertile than the western districts, and so well adapted to pastoral pursuits, that the oaks and the bulls of Bashan (the northern portion of their territory) became proverbial. The most southern of these tribes was Reuben, whose history, like that of Simeon, is almost a blank. Gad, the central tribe, was far more energetic and warlike; to them belonged the land of Gilead proper, though the name "Gilead" is often applied in a wider sense, sometimes as comprehending the whole Israelitish land east of the Jordan. Within the border of Gad lay Ramoth in Gilead, a Levitical city and a city of refuge, which seems to have been built on the spot where Jacob parted from Laban. They possessed also Jabesh-Gilead, renowned as being the one town which, in the early days of the judges, came not to join the confederate tribes against Benjamin. Between this town and Benjamin we can from that time trace a constant

connexion. To the north of Gad lay the half tribe of Manasseh, which possessed the rich land of Bashan, and was the most warlike of all the eastern tribes. The victories of Moses on this side of Jordan were gained over the Amorites, who themselves were Canaanites who had crossed from the west of Jordan and conquered the lands nearest to the river from the Moabites and Ammonites.

The Canaanitish tribes were subdued by Israel; but the two kindred nations of Moab and Ammon, the original possessors of the land, lay yet unconquered around them. These two peoples can hardly be distinguished in the history from each other; both were children of Lot, both were allied together, and they were alike detested by the children of Israel. They dared not to impede the victorious march of the Israelites under Moses, but they strove, through their magic enchantments and the prophetic voice of Balaam, to work them injury. In this they failed, but they never forgot that the land possessed by Israel had once been theirs, and though unable themselves to thrust out the Amorites, they lay in wait for the time when they might in turn conquer the conquerors. We have seen how the Moabite king Eglon invaded the west of Palestine, which must have been preceded by an overrunning of the eastern part; later in the history, a still more complete servitude succeeded, and for eighteen years all the children of Israel east of Jordan were oppressed by the Ammonites.¹ The history once more seems to repeat itself: "When He slew them, then they sought Him: and they returned and enquired early after God."² A great change took

¹ Judges x. 8, 9.

² Psa. lxxviii. 34.

place; they put away the false gods of the nations round, which they had begun to worship, and turned themselves again to Jehovah. An answer came to them, how given we are not told, but it was not given in their favour: "Ye have forsaken Me, and served other gods; go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen."¹ When first they returned to their homes they had raised an altar of witness, that their brethren might not cast them off from the commonwealth of Israel, or say, "What have ye to do with the Lord God of Israel?"² But those days had passed; the influence of the wild heathen tribes around them had been too strong for them, and they had accepted their superstitions, striving probably to mingle them with the true worship. Of national unity there was none; Gilead had not joined his brethren in their great fight under Barak, and could not hope in turn to be rescued by them. A great meeting of the people was held at Mizpeh (or the watch-tower), which is probably the same as Ramoth-Gilead;³ and there, without any thought of their western brethren, the headship over "all the inhabitants of Gilead" was offered to him who should even "*begin* to fight" against their enemies.⁴

In their low estate and distress the elders of Gilead bethought them of one, outlawed from among them, who was apparently leading the life of a freebooter or leader of robbers, but who was known as "a mighty man of valour." To him they went, and prayed him to take the leadership of Gilead. Less noble than Gideon, Jephthah made this honour a condition of his aid; yet from the first the wild outlaw accepted the position as one

¹ Judges x. 13, 14.³ Compare Gen. xxxi. 49; Josh. x. 26.

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² Josh. xxii. 23, 24.⁴ Judges x. 18.

from the Lord. If "the Lord deliver them before me," is his language, and his first act is to utter "all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh;"¹ this last sentence implying some special ceremony by which he devoted himself to the work. His first effort was an attempt at mediation. In his message to the King of the Children of Ammon, we may notice his accurate knowledge of all the events of the first conquest; and in the fact that the words he used are almost literal quotations from the Book of Deuteronomy, we may perhaps learn that these isolated eastern tribes had up to this time preserved, not only some remembrance of the deeds, but copies of the very writings of the great Lawgiver. The message was useless, and Jephthah at once prepared for war. At length he had an assurance of God's favour. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah."² Henceforth he is not merely "a mighty man of valour," but a divinely-appointed judge and leader under God. Rapidly traversing the country, he assembled together the people of Gilead and Bashan; he even strove by a message to bring to his aid the men of his brother tribe of Ephraim.³ It was in vain; he received no help. Supported only by the eastern tribes, Jephthah, to use his own strong expression, "put his life in his hands," and marched against the Ammonites. The result of this act of faith was a complete victory, and to the Lord alone Jephthah ascribed it: "The Lord delivered them into my hand."⁴ As in the wars of Gideon, so now the jealous Ephraimites chided with Jephthah after the victory, declaring that they had never been summoned, and

¹ Judges xi. 9-11.³ Judges xii. 2.² Judges xi. 29.⁴ Judges xii. 3.

threatened to burn him and his house with fire. But "the warrior Gileadite" did not imitate the gentleness of Gideon; his angry reply was followed by a battle, the first in which one tribe of Israel fought with another, moved only by strife and emulation. The sad result was the destruction of a large part of the tribe of Ephraim; and thus through anger, taunting words and battle, the union of Israel was more than ever broken. For six years Jephthah continued to judge, and then died, and was buried in his own land of Gilead.

One other circumstance is known to us, one which must have rendered those six years years of sorrow. His terrible vow is a proof to us of how thoroughly he had become imbued with the feelings of the heathen; "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"¹ This was the gloomy thought that characterized the Moabites, and they answered the question with a terrible assent. In their after wars against Israel, the offering of his eldest son was the last despairing effort of their king.² Jephthah's sin consisted rather in his having "mingled with the heathen and learned their works," than in the actual vow which he had come to believe to be pleasing to God. It has been very well remarked: "Jephthah was right in not being deterred from keeping his vow by the loss and sorrow to himself, just as Abraham was right in not withholding his son, his only son, from God, when commanded to offer him up as a burnt-offering. But Jephthah was wholly wrong in that conception of the character of God which led to his making the rash vow. Had he discovered his fatal

¹ Micah vi. 7.² 2 Kings iii. 27.

error, he would have done right not to slay his child, though the guilt of making and of breaking such a vow would have remained." For the noble maiden we can but feel mingled pity and admiration. We should notice, too, the only cause for which she mourned, and which evidently in the eyes of her historian enhanced the pitifulness of her fate.¹ To be a wife and a mother was the highest desire of every Israelitish woman; may we not trace in that desire an echo of Eve's feeling when she exclaimed, "I have gotten a man from the Lord,"² a remembrance of the promise that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head?

(2.) *The Tribes on the Western Coast of Palestine.*

Dan, the last of the tribes to receive an inheritance, had the territory lying between Judah and Ephraim and the sea allotted to him. The portion was too small for so large a tribe, and they sent forth a colony to the extreme North of Palestine.³ Narrow as was their original settlement, the Philistines disputed it with them. From the first the Philistines succeeded in retaining possession of the sea-coast, and in preserving there the worship of Dagon, or the Fish-god, whose figure was represented as half fish, half man. They drove the Danites into the barren hills and cliffs,⁴ and kept for themselves the cornfields and vineyards of the plain. Shamgar, with his ox-goad, and perhaps Jael, had indeed made a struggle against them, but to no purpose.⁵ For forty years the Lord delivered the Israelites into the hand of the Philistines.⁶ Yet it was

¹ Judges xi. 37, 39.

² Gen. iv. 1.

³ Judges xviii. 1, 2, 27, 28.

⁴ Judges i. 34.

⁵ Judges iii. 31, v. 6.

⁶ Judges xiii. 1.

not impossible for mixed marriages to be made between Israelites and Philistines, for feasts to be held at which both people met, and the men of Judah evidently resented the interruption of this inglorious but quiet state of things.¹ This interruption came through the deeds of one of the last of the judges, the great Danite hero, Samson. In his wondrous birth we are reminded of the birth of Isaac, from whom the whole nation had sprung ; in his Nazarite mode of life, drinking no strong drink or liquor of grapes, and wearing his hair uncut,² he was *separate* unto the Lord, and that not for a time but throughout his life, type of the people who should have been *separate* from the heathen ; in his marvellous acts performed with such apparently simple means, with his own hands and arms or with the jawbone of an ass, he seems to repeat again the lesson of the fall of Jericho, or the destruction of the Midianites at the sound of trumpets and of shoutings. And Samson seems to have been conscious of this. His faith consists in this, that he ever remembered that it was the Spirit of the Lord that moved him, and the power of God that was manifested in his acts. While he came down from the heights of Zorah or the camp of Dan (Mahaneh Dan), and wandered among the vineyards of Timnath, while he shouted and sang of the heaps that he had slain, or revelled in the strength which could not only carry away the gates of Gaza, but, as if in jest, take them to the top of a hill, he constantly remembered Whose strength he was shewing forth. His brethren of Judah, caring not to follow a Danite leader, may betray him, but he will not fall or avenge himself upon them.

¹ Judges xiv. 2, 5, 10, xv. 11. ² Judges xiii. 3, 5, 7 ; Numb. vi. 2, 3, 5.

"Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of Thy servant" are his words when "sore athirst;" and at the last his trust and hope are in Jehovah. "O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God." "*Only this once!*" The words are full of tragic meaning when we remember all that they convey, for it was the last time that the prayer could ever be prayed or the marvellous gift ever granted. For Samson had not only been a type of Israel as aided and gifted by God, but of the backsliding of Israel also. Though directed by the Lord for the working out of His purpose, Samson's desire to marry a Philistine woman is the national crime of "mingling with the heathen" over again; in his uncontrolled passions and evil loves he is like that nation who, forgetting the kindness of her youth, said, "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go."¹ Thus, too, the many servitudes and cries unto the Lord of Israel are re-echoed by the mighty Danite in the last scenes of his life.

"Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves,
Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke."

How like is one description to the other:—

"Thou feedest them with the bread of tears;
And givest them tears to drink in great measure,
Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours;
And our enemies laugh among themselves."²

And if we would give the story a wider application, we have but to see in Samson's marvellous strength an image of all power, mental or physical, and to remember that the same sins of self-will and unrestrained

¹ Jer. ii. 2, 25.

² Psa. lxxx. 5, 6.

desire always at length render such powers useless, or worse than useless.

“Samson’s gifts of bodily strength, which were the consequence in him of the Spirit of God exalting the ordinary powers of man’s muscles and sinews into the heroic might of the Nazarite deliverer, are a type of the quickening of the higher gifts of intellectual power by the informing Spirit into a grander reach of exertions than the merely natural mind could have attained. The employment of these at the mere bidding of the selfish will, for sport, for gain, for the gratification of a vain daring, for the pleasure of unbridled speculation, is the fulfilment in a higher sphere of the casting away of the sensual, wayward judge of the tribe of Dan.”¹

¹ *Heroes of Hebrew History*, by the late Bishop of Winchester.

LESSON VI.

SAMUEL AND THE SCHOOLS OF THE PROPHETS.

WHILE the Philistines were oppressing the coasts of Dan and Judah, the one man who seems to have resisted them was the judge over Central Palestine, the high-priest Eli. It might have been thought that from this first union of the judicial and priestly functions would spring a renewed national life. Now at last Shiloh was the centre both of civil and religious government. But in point of fact no time was so dark, no state so degraded as this. The institution of an order of priests and Levites, separated by God from the rest of their nation, was intended to teach the Israelites the need of their separation from all other nations. To the priests and Levites pertained the offering of sacrifices, the care of the Tabernacle and sacred vessels, and to the office of high-priest belonged the special power of inquiring of God through the mysterious Urim and Thummim. The Levites, dispersed in different cities all over the land, were specially enjoined to teach Israel the statutes of God.¹ But holy things perverted to bad uses are most powerful for evil: "If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" The account given us of the wandering Levite who

¹ Lev. x. 11; Deut. xxxiii. 10.

joined the Danites, and established for them an irregular worship, shews too plainly what the separated tribe might become,¹ while the history of Eli and his sons rendered vain the hope of union for Israel under priestly rule. Greedy, rapacious, dishonest and sensual, Hophni and Phinehas brought the ordained worship of God into utter disrepute. "Men abhorred the offering of the Lord." Though Eli did not share his sons' wickedness, yet his story is a continued warning against that lax feeling which would make us believe that we can cleave to that which is good without abhorring that which is evil. "His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

National disunion was now increased by an aversion to the national worship. It would appear that people strove to "inquire of God" in other places and manners than those appointed. Soon after this time the power of inquiring by Urim and Thummim seems to have departed from the high-priests.² Its place was filled by another office, which first now begins to appear in the history, that of the Prophets. Israel had lost the trust in God as their King, and so needed an earthly king; they had ceased to approach near to God through His ordained priesthood, and so needed the new order of teachers which was mercifully sent to them. The corruptions of Shiloh, however, were not suffered to continue. The Philistines marched into the centre of the land. The Israelites met with defeat and disaster. The two evil priests, making a wrong use of the office given them, profaned the ark by dragging it into battle, to act

¹ Judges xviii.

² The power lingered probably till towards the close of David's reign (2 Sam. xxi. 1), and Abiathar seems to have been the last high-priest who exercised it.

as a charm against their enemies. The overthrow was complete. Up the ascent through the town of Shiloh the news was brought; the cry raised in the city told the aged priest of disaster as he sat watching; then followed the terrible news, blow on blow descending on him, till at the last, "the ark of God is taken!" he sunk down to rise no more. His death was followed by that of his daughter-in-law. Truly might it be said—

"Their priests were slain by the sword;
And there were no widows to make lamentation."¹

In this darkest period of Jewish history, there is, as ever with God's Church, some light; and here the light streams from the story of an innocent child and his mother. In Hannah's prophetic psalm of praise we are reminded of Miriam and Deborah, and far more of one "blessed among women,"² who was to be the mother of a yet greater Son. The words go far beyond the joy of "the barren woman" who had become "a joyful mother of children," far beyond the triumph of Hannah over Peninnah, and speak of a confounding of the great and mighty things of this world by the weak, a revelation given to babes, which was only realized in the Church of Christ. Nay, the very word *Christ*, or *Messiah*, the Anointed One, is first used by Hannah;³ and her words are re-echoed in those familiar phrases—"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek." The holiness and innocence of the child Samuel is constantly brought before us, as he ministered unto the Lord before Eli the priest, a Nazarite with uncut hair like Samson, wearing a linen ephod, opening the doors

¹ Psa. lxxviii. 64.

² Luke i. 28, 42.

³ 1 Sam. ii. 10.

of the house of the Lord. "The child was young," "he ministered before the Lord, being a child," "he grew before the Lord." These thoughts are at length expressed in words almost identical with those used of a Holier Child—"He was in favour both with the Lord and also with men." At the close of a long life, Samuel was able to point back to this holy childhood, and to affirm that his whole course had been consistent with it. "I have walked," he said, "before you from my childhood unto this day." If we are ever tempted to exalt unduly the zeal and warmth of love which often follow a sudden conversion, if we are ever led to dream that a youth misspent and an early life of carelessness may be redeemed, if it shall please God later on to touch the heart, let us remember that this special blessedness of a growing holiness, commenced in childhood, and gradually developing and increasing, can never belong to those who have to mourn

"For lavish'd hours and love misspent."

The prodigal may return to his father, but it is not to him that the words are spoken: "Son, thou art *ever with me*, and all that I have is thine."

Through the innocent lips of the child, God's terrible message was conveyed to Eli; the fame of it spread, and from his early years "all Israel knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." For twenty years after the death of Eli he seems to have lived in seclusion, while the Philistines oppressed the country. At the end of that time he appears as a deliverer with that suddenness which we generally mark in the raising up of one of the judges.¹ He strives at

¹ 1 Sam. vii. 3.

once for union. "Gather *all* Israel to Mizpeh" are his words, and there, with prayer and fasting, he renews the covenant between God and the people. They are still engaged in prayer and sacrifice when the enemy draws near. The cries to God are mingled with the clash of weapons, but the answer to the prayer is granted at once. "The Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, . . . and they were smitten before Israel." A period of rest and peace followed, during which Samuel judged Israel. To preserve the national unity he seems to have endeavoured to extend his jurisdiction over the whole land ; he himself went in regular circuits through the central region, while he sent his sons to judge at Beersheba in the extreme south. But he could not succeed wholly. His sons, partaking of the corruption of the time, "walked not in his ways," and, partly from the hopelessness of obtaining uniform justice throughout the land, partly from the need felt for a settled leader, who should lead not one or two tribes but all Israel to battle, the people united in asking for a king. We have no right to ascribe to Samuel any undue clinging to old institutions when the time had come for newer ones ; still less have we any right to accuse him of jealousy over his own rights as judge and ruler. The one cause why this demand was the great sorrow of his life was, that it was the confession that Israel could no longer hope to fill up the ideal set before them ; that through their own unworthiness they had rendered for ever impossible that kingdom which might have been theirs. "The Lord your God was your King" are his mournful, indignant words. And God's words to him were more than a consolation for loss of power or wounded vanity.

"Hearken unto the voice of the people, . . . for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them." The rejection was not so much in this present request for a king, but in that which had rendered the request needful—the constant mingling with the heathen, the deadness of their worship of the true God, which had so broken up the tribes as to destroy the commonwealth of Israel. The old state of things having become impossible, Samuel was now to hearken to the proposal for a new. He could not thus see the first glories of his nation swept away without regret; but the generosity of his nature is shewn in the heart and hope with which he strives to inspire the people for the altered state of things, in his constant prayers, and in the earnestness and love with which he seeks to aid the new king.

The direct rule of God was thus superseded by that of an earthly king; so also the direct messages of God given by Urim and Thummim to the high-priest were gradually superseded by messages delivered through the consciousness and by the voice of living men. We have met with many instances of the prophetic gift being granted before this time; Moses, Miriam, Deborah, and Hannah all prophesied. We read, too, of instances of prophets, whose names are not recorded, who were charged with God's messages during the time of the Judges.¹ But, until the time of Samuel, there was no distinct order of the prophets. In using the word 'Prophet,' let us remember that it does not only mean 'predicter,' or one who foretells events. Doubtless the prophets were often predictors, but their real office was a higher one than this. They were the

¹ Judges vi. 8; 1 Sam. ii. 27.

messengers of God, the watchmen to the house of Israel, sent to declare His will to His people. They were therefore quite as much *preachers* as predictors. They had a direct gift from God: "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."¹ But this gift did not supersede altogether their own individuality, still less did it control their will. It could be misused like other gifts. Hence the constant mention of false prophets and false prophetesses, and that fatal perversion of it which came from the mouth of a high-priest.² It could, like other gifts, be improved and strengthened; hence the founding by Samuel of those establishments called "Schools of the Prophets." In these colleges Samuel gathered together the promising students of his time, to train them for the prophetic order. There might be men like Amos on whom the gift of prophecy came without training,³ but as a rule it came to those trained and prepared for it. These lived together in the colleges of Ramah, Bethel, Jericho, or Gilgal, presided over by a leading prophet, and having their meals in common. Their numbers were sometimes very many, as when Obadiah hid a hundred at a time from Jezebel.⁴

The prophetic utterances were generally poetical. Not only the Psalms, but great portions of the books of the prophets, are strictly poetry. This poetical prophecy was often accompanied and apparently aided by music.⁵ They also, however, taught by prose writings and speeches, among which must be classed such histories as we have in Isaiah and Daniel, other histories now lost, such as "the book of Nathan

¹ 2 Pet. i. 21.

² John xi. 50, 51.

³ Amos vii. 14.

⁴ 1 Sam. xix. 19, 20; 2 Kings ii. 3, 5, iv. 38; 1 Kings xviii. 4.

⁵ 1 Sam. x. 5; 2 Kings iii. 15.

the prophet, and the book of Gad the seer,"¹ and spoken parables and apologues, which, in later days, were so much used by the greatest of the Prophets, our Blessed Lord. For all these things the "companies" or schools founded by Samuel afforded training, but for all of them the Spirit of the Lord was needed as much as before by Othniel, Jephthah, or Samson. That the distinct office of the prophets should arise at the same time as that of the kings, indicates at once the great part the prophets were to play as advisers of both kings and people. It was in fact a new administration of the Spirit poured out, not (as in Christian times) on all God's people, but on individual men for special purposes. His power alone enabled single men to stand against numbers as Elijah did, to warn great kings as Nathan, or to cheer and strengthen a captive people as Ezekiel and Daniel. But something like this power given to individuals had been seen before. What was new in this administration was, that the gift should animate a whole body of men; that it should be a gift capable of increase and received by one from another; an enthusiasm which, spreading among them, witnessed that God was indeed with them. This gift, as has been said, "abounds when sought by all as one, and by each as a part of the whole, but dies out in separation, and languishes in each as it ebbs from the common body."² First perceived in these days of Samuel, this sense of one Spirit animating one Body was not fully realized till the great day of Pentecost, but from that time it has been possessed by the Spirit-bearing Church.

¹ 1 Chron. xxix. 29. Jeremiah also is thought by some, not without reason, to have compiled 1 and 2 Kings.

² *Heroes of Hebrew History.*

LESSON VII.

THE REIGN OF SAUL.

THE establishment of a monarchy in Israel was begun under cheering circumstances. Although it seemed to supersede the more immediate and holier form of government by God, yet it was capable of equal or even greater blessedness.¹ "The Lord will not forsake His people," was the Prophet's announcement after the new order of things had commenced. And the first king appeared to be one well adapted for the high office. Tall, strong and beautiful, Saul's noble outward form was not the greatest of his gifts; with the energy and courage that always distinguished a Benjamite, he joined a gracious modesty and a rare generosity. In those early days he was "little in his own sight;"² in the heat of his first victory he forbade that any man should be put to death that day in revenge for their treatment of him.³ To those great natural qualities there were added special gifts from God; he was chosen expressly by God and not by man, and he knew it; both privately and publicly he had been named "the Lord's Anointed." The title is frequently applied to him, and was in its nature a first indication of the

¹ 1 Sam. xii. 22.

² 1 Sam. xv. 17.

³ 1 Sam. xi. 13.

true kingly office of Christ, the Messiah or Anointed One. The holiest and greatest man of his time gave to Saul his love, his counsel, and his prayers;¹ and above all he had a direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit of God.² Not only did the Spirit of God come upon him before a battle, as on the Judges in earlier times, but that newer manifestation of it which characterized his own times, was vouchsafed to him. Falling in with the company of the prophets, he too prophesied, filled with the one Spirit that filled them; till others, moved by the wondrous sight, exclaimed, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"³ Thus, in his glorious youth, he seemed marked out to accomplish God's purposes. He was the "chosen of the Lord," and was remembered as such even after his death.⁴

Let us learn to reflect when we use the word "election" that it does not necessarily imply final perseverance. Saul was clearly *elect*ed in the fullest sense of the word. "Thou shalt be turned into another man,"⁵ is the promise to him, and the promise was fully kept. "God gave him another heart." And yet he fell from God. And the explanation is that he was wilful, and God did not constrain his will. "Almighty God," it has been said, "chose an instrument adapted, as far as external qualifications were concerned, to fulfil His purpose; adapted in character and gifts, in all respects except in that in which all men are on the whole on a level,—in will." And the same writer says, "The world prevailed over the faith of Balaam; a more subtle, though not a rare temptation, overcame the faith of Saul: wilfulness, the

¹ 1 Sam. x. 8, xv. 11, 35, xvi. 1.

² 1 Sam. xi. 6.

³ 1 Sam. x. 11.

⁴ 2 Sam. xxi. 6.

⁵ 1 Sam. x. 6, 9.

unaccountable desire of acting short of simple obedience to God's will, a repugnance of unreserved self-surrender and submission to Him."¹

At first however all was glory and success. The hopes of the nation seemed accomplished. The wild Ammonites, recovering from their defeat by Jephthah, strive once more to possess themselves of Gilead. Jabesh-Gilead, the town attacked, sends a despairing message to its old allies the Benjamites. The result is indeed different from that which followed Jephthah's message to Ephraim. A fresh vigour and union mark the commencement of the monarchy. Throughout "*all* the coasts of Israel" Saul sends his summons, and Israel and Judah assemble to follow him, three hundred and thirty thousand men.² The victory that followed served to confirm and renew the king's rule. But the work of delivering Israel was not complete. This victory rescued the land east of Jordan, but the western foes, the Philistines, still had garrisons through the land. An attack on one of these by Saul's son Jonathan led to a new Philistine invasion. The terror felt by the unarmed Israelites seemed to render their cause hopeless.³ Distress, trembling and desertion followed Saul's efforts to organize a defence. And now for the first time the wilfulness and want of faith which brought Saul to ruin appeared. He knew that Samuel's voice was the voice of God to him, and knowing it he disobeyed it. When he offered the burnt-offering at Gilgal, he allowed his faith in God's will as declared by His Prophet to sink before considerations of worldly prudence. Now, as again later, he shewed

¹ NEWMAN'S *Oxford University Sermons*.

² 1 Sam. xi. 7, 8.

³ 1 Sam. xiii. 22.

that he had not learnt the lesson, "to obey is better than sacrifice." We should notice two things here: first, that Saul's wilfulness was useless—the people still melted away from him;¹ second, that Samuel's rebuke, "Thou hast done foolishly, . . . thy kingdom shall not continue," by no means left Saul without the hope of yet redeeming his reign. Had Saul repented then, had he shewn any of that sorrowing contrition for sin, mingled with resolution for the future, that so distinguished his successor, all might yet have been well with him.

Years passed on, years of great prosperity and success to Saul; the hopes of the people were accomplished; all Israel was united, and, fighting under one leader, conquered their enemies, not here and there, but on every side.² The reign of the king was firmly established; his court imitated the magnificence of other kingdoms around. But a second trial came at length; the war with Amalek was to be a war of extermination, like the first war of Israel with the Canaanites.³ The command to Saul was as plain as that to Joshua. But Saul followed the example of Achan rather than that of Joshua, and once more wilfully disobeyed. It seemed to him a pity to destroy what was good, and he probably desired a grand ceremonial and splendid sacrifice at the conclusion of the war.⁴ Again the lower motives, the wilful desire, were substituted for the higher duty of obedience. Samuel yearns over him still with love, strives in prayer for him, and seems to long yet to serve this chosen one of the Lord. But the miserable excuses, the utter breakdown of all truth

¹ 1 Sam. xiii. 15, 16.² 1 Sam. xiv. 47.³ 1 Sam. xv. 3.⁴ 1 Sam. xv. 21.

and honesty, the mean equivocations that follow, awake his scorn and righteous anger. Far louder now peals the voice of judgment. "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king;" and, as if pointing to the falseness of Saul's answers, "Also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man that He should repent." "To obey is better than sacrifice." The words were truly applicable to Saul, who twice, for the sake of doing sacrifice, had disobeyed; and his rebellion is compared with witchcraft, a sin against which Saul had been specially zealous.¹ And that his disobedience was due to no feelings of humanity, or his zeal directed to keeping his word, is shewn by his conduct to the Gibeonites. Joshua had sworn to them, and he and the elders had kept the oath: it was Saul who first broke it, and was zealous, not for truth, but for conquest.² No longer visited and counselled by God's prophet, the days of Saul began to darken. His armies were still victorious, but he is no longer the man he once was. The change is awfully described in the one verse, "The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." No longer gifted with prophetic utterances, his mind is troubled, and reason at last totters on her throne. The moral fall has brought with it an intellectual fall. Yet, still in his changed condition, Saul inspires love: his servants are anxious for his good, the absent prophet mourns for him; the noble son, companion of his victories, clings to him to the last, and hardly will believe evil of him;³ while one bright form, in youthful freshness and

¹ 1 Sam. xxviii. 3.² 2 Sam. xxi. 1, 2.³ 1 Sam. xvi. 15, 16, xxviii. 28, xv. 35, xx. 2, xvi. 22, 23.

loveliness, stands by him, and strives with music to soothe his weary spirit.

It was in vain. To his other sins is added now a dark jealousy which leads him to plunge deeper into crime. How terribly significant is the miserable fear which haunts the godless man in the presence of the young servant of God.¹ "Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him." The fear and the jealousy grow into hatred; the hatred leads to repeated attempts at murder, and at last to a massacre.² Yet gleams of the old light still break through the heavy darkness; but they become rarer as each one is misused. There were times when, during his long pursuit and cruel hunting of his best friend, Saul might yet have recovered something of his former position. Once, when in the very act of pursuit, a return again of the old prophetic fervour came to him, once more within the influence of "the goodly fellowship of the prophets" he too became as one of them, once more men asked wonderingly, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"³ How changed is the anointed of the Lord from those bright days when first the words were uttered! The moment of inspiration passed, and no repentance followed. Soon after this time he narrowly escaped being the murderer of his own son.⁴ Yet some consciousness of his fallen condition remained; he weeps yet⁵ at the well-remembered voice of him who calls him still "My father." "I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly," is his mournful confession.

But the end was drawing near. The aged Prophet Samuel was dead, and "all Israel," reunited through

¹ 1 Sam. xviii. 12, 15, 29.

² 1 Sam. xxii. 17, 18.

³ 1 Sam. xix. 24.

⁴ 1 Sam. xx. 33.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxiv. 16.

his care, "had lamented him, and buried him."¹ The greatest warrior in the kingdom was an outlaw when a great invasion of the land by the Philistines took place. For the first time in his life Saul feared before the enemy.² No voice is heard to aid him, no light is given; he is left to the guidance of that self-will which in earlier days he had chosen to follow. The misuser of God's gifts can see no visions. In vain he inquires of the Lord after the ancient manner; the destroyer of God's priests receives no answer by Urim. The newer mode is closed to him also, for he has disobeyed God's prophet. And now the last desperate resolution is taken, and "he who had long grieved the Holy Spirit of God shewed at last that he had quenched it." "Saul will summon by an evil magic . . . the dead from their graves, and win from the world of darkness and of death that knowledge which the world of light and of life refuses to impart to him. This consulting with the witch of Endor on the part of Israel's anointed king was probably as nearly the sin against the Holy Ghost as it was possible for one under the Old Covenant, and before the day of Pentecost, to commit."³ We must not suppose that the appearance of Samuel was an imposture with which the woman succeeded in deluding the king, nor yet that she really possessed the power to summon the Prophet from the grave. None was more startled by it than she herself!⁴ And it was Saul who "perceived that it was Samuel." He bowed before him as in earlier days,⁵ but it was no longer the kiss of peace and assurance of God's favour that he

¹ 1 Sam. xxviii. 3.² 1 Sam. xxviii. 5.³ *Shipwrecks of Faith*, by the Archbp. of Dublin.⁴ 1 Sam. xxviii. 12, 13.⁵ 1 Sam. xxviii. 14; comp. x. 1.

received. His terrible doom followed. The words are not merely "The Lord hath rejected thee," but "The Lord is become thine enemy;" and the sentence was defeat and death. Can we wonder that he despaired, and fell with his tall form, once so goodly and rising above all others, "all along on the earth"? Through the darkness and the night he returned to his camp on Mount Gilboa, and then on the morrow lost for the first time a battle, and with it his life. He did not care to live, but sought his death; and thus at the last was not divided from his noble son. The refrain of David's lament describes too truly not only the death of Saul, but his life, his gradual fall, and his perversion of God's gifts—"How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"¹

¹ 2 Sam. i. 27.

LESSON VIII.

THE YOUTH OF DAVID.

WE know more of David than of any of the chief men of Israelitish history. We have not only a detailed history of his life, but in his Psalms the outpouring of his heart, the deepest feelings of his soul, expressed at different periods of his life. Many of the events of his life are typical of those of our Blessed Lord. These events called forth a wonderful development of thought and feeling, which, passing through the Psalms of David into the meditations of all the people of Israel, prepared the way for the Son of David. David was born at Bethlehem, which from that circumstance had first a certain sanctity attached to it. To his birthplace David seems to have been specially attached; he longed in his thirst for the water from its well,¹ and it retained many years after the name of "City of David."² In his childhood the boy must have heard from his father Jesse the stories of his own family, and must have learned that he numbered Rahab the Canaanitess and Ruth the Moabitess among his ancestors. It was to Moab that he turned in the after days of his wanderings for a refuge for his father

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 15.

² Luke ii. 4.

and mother,¹ he remembered kindnesses received from the kindred people of Ammon,² he suffered some of the Jebusite population of Jerusalem to retain their property after he had conquered them, and he employed in his armies a great number of foreigners. These were results of his own mixed ancestry, preparations for Him Who should open the Church to Gentile as well as Jew.

David's early occupation was that of keeping his father's sheep, in those days a dangerous employment, from the wild beasts who came from the thickets of Jordan to attack the sheep. With these he early fought, and his conquest over a lion and a bear made him known among his people as "a mighty man of valour." This open-air life no doubt produced in him the intense love of nature that breathes throughout the Psalms. While watching the sheep he "considered the heavens, the moon and the stars, which God had ordained;" and feeling the apparent littleness of man, wondered at God's love towards him, while from his employment he learned to picture the tenderness and watchfulness of that love. "The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing." It is the first hallowing of the shepherd life, and the first comparison made between it and a wise pastoral care for men. The comparison was not forgotten; it was repeated again in later times in the words, "He took him from the sheepfolds . . . to feed Jacob his people,"³ and its spirit reappears in the expressions, "Hear, O Thou Shepherd of Israel," "We are His people and the sheep of His pasture," which prepare the way for the gracious words, "I am the Good Shepherd."

¹ 1 Sam. xxii. 3.² 2 Sam. x. 2, xxiv. 18, 23.³ Psa. lxxviii. 70, 71.

It was literally from the sheep that David was called for his first anointing. It is quite clear that he was anointed not to be at that time king, but to be Saul's successor. For this reason Samuel was not to disturb the peace of Saul's kingdom by any public announcement of it.¹ David knew this, and never attempted to dispute the kingdom with Saul, though for the same reason he did dispute it afterwards with Saul's son Ishbosheth. From this time "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David," and he may thus be numbered from his youth among the prophets. He became known for the power of his prophetic utterances, which were frequently connected with music and poetry. This power was now employed to soothe the unhappy hours of the king. David's Psalms have consoled many weary ones since they were first sung to the maddened king of Israel; and in this as in so many other things he is a type of Him Who is the Consoler of the world. Like Him also he was content to remain in obscurity until God's time came when he should become renowned; retiring from Saul's court once more to keep the sheep at Bethlehem.

But the event soon followed which made his name for ever renowned. In his combat with the Philistine we see the strong simple faith which never even in the darkest scenes of his life forsook him. All such combats are pictures of the faith that overcometh the world, but none is more strikingly so than this one, when the young unarmed shepherd boy laid low the champion of Gath. It was a deed that could never be forgotten in Israel, and was followed by David's rapid rise as the chief warrior at Saul's court. We cannot wonder that the

¹ 1 Sam. xvi. 2.

king, who had only before seen him during his dark hours of illness and unsettled reason, did not recognise again the youth who had once charmed those heavy hours.¹ The deeper side of David's nature is shewn in his constant unwavering faith, the more human side is marked by his intense power of loving and of inspiring love. When we consider the peculiar relation in which David was placed with Jonathan, we shall find the story of their friendship the most touching and the most lovely of any recorded in history. Each of the two knew that his life was in the hand of the other. When Saul's attempt on David's life commenced, it was Jonathan who pleaded for him, who concealed him and aided his escape. Yet Jonathan in his turn said, "Thou shalt . . . while yet I live, shew me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not;"² for in the natural expectation of outliving his father he felt that then his life would be in David's hands. All along he knew that his lost inheritance, lost through no sin of his own, would go to David;³ all along David knew that it would be his, yet taunts addressed to Jonathan and persecutions suffered by David never raised one flame of jealousy to disturb the holiness of their love. Scarcely less fervent, though perhaps less noble, was the love of Jonathan's sister Michal for David. It was perhaps not kindled until David's fame had greatly increased; and possibly those songs in which the women of Israel sang the praises of their young hero, while they raised the jealousy of the father, fixed the love of the daughter.⁴ In spite of every secret effort made by Saul for his destruction, David became the king's son-

¹ 1 Sam. xvii. 15, 55-58.² 1 Sam. xix. 4, 5, xx. 19, 41, 42, xx. 14.³ 1 Sam. xxiii. 17, xx. 30, 31.⁴ 1 Sam. xviii. 7, 8, 20.

in-law, the constant conqueror of the Philistines, the darling of the people.¹ Secret means having failed, the king tried open ones.² His state became worse, and David's music no longer soothed it. In his mad jealousy he separated himself from the one who might be called his good genius. The love and watchfulness of his wife Michal saved David from the final and prepared attack on his life.³ Her expression to him—which should be translated, "If thou save not thy soul to-night"—is repeated by David in the Psalms in which he commemorated his deliverance, and said, "They lie in wait for my *soul*,"⁴ "Lest he tear my *soul* like a lion."⁵ By the morning he was far from their reach, and able in safety to sing, as he said, of God's power; "Yea," he added, in his joy at having left behind night, his enemies, treachery, and ungodliness, "I will sing aloud of Thy mercy in the morning."⁶

A period of trial and of suffering was to follow. Remembering his anointing by Samuel, it was to the Prophet that David now fled. Welcomed by him, he joined the company of the prophets at Naioth, or "the pastures" of Ramah. It was but for a short time, but served no doubt to strengthen the faith of David and to shew him how he should direct his future course. He seems never again to have met the Prophet who anointed him, and was God's instrument in taking him from the sheepfolds. Driven from Ramah, David fled to Nob, a town on the Mount of Olives, where, since the destruction of Shiloh, the tabernacle was set up.⁷ The Ark was still far away, but round the tabernacle many priests had collected; and David, forced away from the

¹ 1 Sam. xviii. 27, 16.² 1 Sam. xix. 9, 10.³ 1 Sam. xix. 11.⁴ Psa. lix. 3.⁵ Psa. vii. 2.⁶ Psa. lix. 16.⁷ 1 Sam. xxi. 1.

company of the prophets, came to inquire of the Lord through the priest, and to seek for food and arms. Ahimelech the high-priest failed in that courage in defence of the right which Samuel had shewn; yet, as if in punishment for that failure, the revenge of the king, which never attacked Samuel, fell on him and his. Saul no doubt justified his massacre of the priests to himself by the fact that they had allowed the holy shewbread to be eaten by one not a priest contrary to the law; it was his old error reappearing, each time in a darker form. With him, to sacrifice was better than to obey; the ceremonial law stood above all laws of humanity. But the faith of David enabled him to rise to a higher region; he knew that "the life was more than meat," and his deed gave to the Lord Jesus an example to illustrate the meaning of the words, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."¹ The massacre of the priests, by laying one more crime on his conscience, was certain to increase Saul's hatred of David, and accordingly from this time his pursuit of him becomes more hot.

From Nob to his enemies the Philistines, from them again to an outlaw's life in the cave of Adullam; sometimes in a fortress or "hold," for a short time in a strong town Keilah; sometimes in the forest or the wilderness among the cliffs of Engedi or the pastures of the southern Carmel,² David from this time led the life of a wanderer. Pursued by one who had been his friend, betrayed again and again by those among whom he sought for refuge, the joyous youth, the successful conqueror, went at this time through a very furnace of affliction. Yet some consolation still remained.

¹ Matt. xii. 3-7.

² 1 Sam. xxi. 10, xxii. 1, 3-5, xxiii. 4, 14, 19, 29, xxv. 5, 13, 30.

A prophet of the Lord counselled him,¹ a priest inquired for him, and to both he was obedient. Gradually, too, a band of men gathered around him, Gadites came from beyond Jordan, children of Benjamin and Judah, captains of thousands from Manasseh.² Already the sense that this wanderer was the chosen of Jehovah was gaining ground; and at length this sense was expressed by Amasa, David's nephew, who, speaking by the Spirit of God, exclaimed, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thy helpers, for thy God helpeth thee." Peace, however, seemed to be far off. Fighting, struggling, flying, David's time of trial was a heavy one. What wonder if the watchword of his life at this time was the prayer, "Destroy not."³ Twice the life of Saul was in his power, and he respected the Lord's anointed and saved him.

But mingling with these nobler traits are darker features, which betray the imperfection of David's character. He sinned in the oath he took to revenge himself on Nabal, but rose above the obedience of the letter to that of the spirit, when he thanked God that he had not kept the vow. He sinned when he deceived Achish,⁴ and reaped the reward of his deceit in being forced to march for a time with his enemies, and in the destruction and harrying of his people at Ziklag during his absence.⁵

Do we think, when we read these stories, of the lives we have read of other freebooters and out-

¹ 1 Sam. xxii. 5, xxiii. 6, 9.

² 1 Chron. xii. 8, 16, 19, 20.

³ Such seems to be the meaning of the words "Al-taschith," which are found in the headings to Psalms lvii., lviii., lix.

⁴ 1 Sam. xxvii. 10.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxix. 2, xxx. 1-4.

laws? Are we inclined to ask, Was this a fitting life for him who was to establish the kingdom in Israel, who was all the time the anointed of the Lord? Let us turn to the inner life of this period, and there find the answer to our question. More than in the early shepherd days, more than in his wars or life at the court of Saul, David felt and acknowledged the close presence of God during his wanderings. In the dry and thirsty land where no water was it was yet for God that his soul thirsted,¹ His loving-kindness was better than life itself; when cruelly betrayed, his comfort was that the goodness of God endured yet daily;² and what bursts of joy and glory to God came from his lips, even during this terrible time of his life, when he might, if faith had failed, have imagined himself cast off and forgotten. He "wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth,"³ but the desert was full of God, the mountain shewed forth God, his rock, the dark sides of the cave were the shadow of God's wings, in which refuge he exclaimed, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise."⁴ And when times of depression came, with them came deeper and deeper spiritual experiences—"When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knewest my path;" and from the depth of this experience arose the clear perception which ever distinguished David from Saul,—a perception of the value of the spirit over the letter of the law. Separated from outward ordinances in his wild life, he could exclaim, "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire. . . . Then said I, Lo, I come. . . . I delight to do Thy will, O my God."⁵

¹ Psa. lxxiii. 1. ² Psa. liii. ³ Heb. xi. 32, 38. ⁴ Psa. lvii. ⁵ Psa. xl.

This earlier portion of David's life was thus in a twofold sense a preparation : first, of David for his future position as king of Israel ; second, for the growth of the Messianic idea in the mind of the nation. David's early seclusion, his foreign connexions, his fame as a successful warrior, his training among men of various character at the court of Saul, and finally his time of trial and wandering, all these fitted him for his future life. These things prepared his nation also for the life of Him Who made Jew and Gentile one, Who conquered in greater victories than those of Israel over the Philistines, and Who shewed the world that the Kingdom of God could only be entered through tribulation.

LESSON IX.

THE REIGN OF DAVID.

WHEN the wild Amalekite, thinking to please David, brought to him the crown and royal ornaments of Saul with the news of his death,¹ David's first emotions were those of indignation at one who could slay the Lord's anointed, and of sorrow for the deaths of his earliest benefactor and his dearest friend. But the news necessarily produced other thoughts; it was the announcement to him that God's time had come, and his period of wandering was over. He did not inquire of God as to whether he should take the kingdom, but simply as to the city in which he should first set up his rule.² When Hebron was indicated to him, he at once went there, and being again anointed, this time publicly, commenced his reign. That at first he was only recognised by Judah made no difference to his position; he knew that he should at last be king over all, and even extend his rule over the heathen, and that a people whom he had not known should serve him.³

Although not the first king, David was yet in a very real sense the founder of the Jewish monarchy. He established and really carried out the true Kingship

¹ 2 Sam. i.

² 2 Sam. ii. 1.

³ Psa. xviii. 43.

which Samuel had in vain hoped to see realized in Saul. This idea of Kingship which was now beginning to grow among the Jews was very important, as adding something to their anticipations for the future. The establishment of the priesthood and of the sacrifices had indicated the need of a mediator who could offer to God for sin; the rise of the prophets had familiarized the people with the position of a teacher of righteousness; finally, the establishment of a monarchy taught the expectation of a Messianic kingdom. The Israelitish kings were to be, first, leaders in battle, second, executors of justice in war and peace;² they were absolute rulers, in whose hands lay the very persons and lives of their subjects; they had the power of imposing taxes and exacting personal service; yet more, in Israel the king was the anointed of the Lord, the very representative of Jehovah to his people. Thus, when the hope of the Deliverer grew stronger and clearer, all these institutions aided in making it understood. Priest, Prophet, King, each contributed to the idea of the future Messiah. The Priesthood taught them that He Who was to come must take away sins; the Prophets taught that He must witness against ungodliness; the establishment of David's monarchy added this thought, that the Deliverer must have power over all, must go forth conquering and to conquer, and must be the Anointed or Messiah, the Christ of God. And one more thought began from this time to mingle itself with the others; David inherited his kingdom after great sorrow and tribulation; would not the highest ideal of a ruler be henceforth joined to that of a sufferer?

² 1 Sam. viii. 20.

For seven years and a half David ruled over Judah in Hebron, while Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, ruled over the rest of Israel, making Mahanaim, on the east of Jordan, his residence.¹ The schism of the kingdom was caused by Abner's strong attachment to the house of Saul. Great captain as he was, he had influence and power enough to dispute the kingdom with David, though he certainly knew, as did all the elders of Israel, who it was the Lord had chosen.² Fighting against this knowledge, Abner struggled to maintain Ishbosheth's cause, until a fatal quarrel separated his great follower from the son of Saul. The quarrel was fatal to both, for it led to the violent death of each. In David's lament for Abner we see again the generosity and the love which made him cling to the early friends and protectors of his youth. He had lamented over Saul and Jonathan, who fell on the field of battle; how much more should he mourn when a prince and a great man was fallen in Israel, and had died, as he bitterly said, "as a fool dieth."³ David's age was now thirty-six, but already the brightness and hope of early life were passing from him. He could no longer hope that his throne would be surrounded by those whom he most loved and trusted. "Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee," had been Jonathan's expression of a hope which was quenched for ever on Mount Gilboa. Michal, David's wife, had been given to another, and though she now returned to him, the early love between them seems to have been broken;⁴ while in the place of the great Abner appears now the fierce stern form of his murderer Joab. He and his

¹ 2 Sam. ii. 8, 9.² 2 Sam. iii. 9, 10, v. 2.³ 2 Sam. iii. 38, 33.⁴ 1 Sam. xxv. 44; 2 Sam. iii. 13-16.

brother Abishai, the sons of David's half-sister Zeruiah,¹ were probably of about the same age as David himself; their relationship to the king, and their extraordinary valour and activity, marked them out as supporters of the future monarchy; yet David shrank with gloomy foreboding from their companionship. "I am this day weak, though anointed king," he said; "and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, be too hard for me."²

The murder of Ishbosheth placed the whole kingdom at length in David's hands. His vengeance on the murderers proceeded from a different cause to that which had moved him in the case of Saul. The Amalekite had slain "the Lord's anointed;" David did not regard Ishbosheth to be the Lord's anointed, but as one who, innocent of all crime, had been foully murdered on his bed, and he therefore punished his murderers with death.³ And now all Israel was again one united kingdom. A great feast at Hebron celebrated the joy with which the people assembled with "one heart to make David king."⁴ Hebron was no longer central enough for the capital of the kingdom. Saul had been content to live at his native place of Gibeah, caring little for the unity of the kingdom either politically or religiously, and evidently favouring his own tribe of Benjamin above all others.⁵ This would not do for David, and he resolved on fixing his capital at Jerusalem, which, half in Judah, half in Benjamin, formed a fitting centre of national life. Jerusalem, or Jebus, was still in the hands of the original inhabitants, the Jebusites.

¹ It has been conjectured that Abigail and Zeruiah were daughters of Jesse's wife by a former husband, Nahash, king of the Ammonites. Compare 1 Chron. ii. 16 with 2 Sam. xvii. 25.

² 2 Sam. iii. 39.

³ 2 Sam. iv. 10-12.

⁴ 1 Chron. xii. 38-40.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxii. 7.

The fortress was built on a high table-land, and was separated again from the rocky plateau of which it forms a part by deep ravines or valleys on the west, south, and south-east. So deep were these clefts that the Jebusites considered their fortress impregnable, and tauntingly exclaimed that the blind and the lame would suffice to defend it.¹ "All Israel" had marched with David, but it was Joab's courage and activity that first gained the rocky height and won for him the position which Abner had formerly held.² At once David repaired and improved the city, and fixed there his royal residence; from henceforth Israel was to have a true capital, not under Saul's pomegranate or Deborah's palm-tree, but on the throne in the royal city was Israel's king to do judgment and justice. It was a great change in the history of the nation; it implied the stability and permanency of the kingdom established,—which from henceforth grew and strengthened itself on every side, while not the least significant fact in connexion with the new conquest is that the king's palace was built, as the result of the first foreign alliance, by that Hiram king of Tyre who "was ever a lover of David."³

From this time the names Jerusalem and Zion⁴ become the most memorable in Jewish history. They are even more than that; the whole significance of David's conquest did not end when Titus overthrew Jerusalem with Roman armies. The teaching conveyed to us by the thought of a "Holy City," a "City of God," can only be exhausted when into the New

¹ 2 Sam. v. 6.² 1 Chron. xi. 4-6.³ 1 Kings v. 1.⁴ This was the citadel of Jerusalem, called the "City of David." This last expression, however, is in the New Testament always applied to Bethlehem.

Jerusalem shall be brought "the glory and honour of the nations."¹

That teaching however begins now with David. He desired to hallow the chief city in the same manner as the nation had been hallowed. Israel was to be separate from the heathen and the centre of a pure worship of the true God. So David wished both to "cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord,"² and to establish there the great seat of the national worship. To this end he resolved to bring up the ark, which, taken by the Philistines and returned by them in terror, had for many years rested at Kirjath-jearim, and had quite ceased to be the centre of worship. Much did he think of it in sleepless nights,³ earnestly did he consult over it with his people,⁴ and at length he assembled not one or two tribes, but all the now united Israel, to bring up the ark of God to Zion. The unlawful manner in which this was at first attempted, and the consequent death of Uzza, delayed the accomplishment of his purpose, but after three months the attempt was renewed, and the ark was brought to Zion.⁵ To David it was the fulfilment of the very purpose for which the Lord had chosen him; the tribes of Israel were now one in a sense in which they had never been since the time of Joshua; it remained only for the church to be one, and putting away all schisms and idolatries, to worship at one central place, and there to appear before Jehovah. Remembering this, we shall not wonder at the burst of joy with which David expressed the feelings of his heart on that day. His gifts of music, of poetry, and of prophecy were all called on to shew forth his thankfulness;

¹ Rev. xxi. 2, 26.

² Psa. ci. 8.

³ Psa. cxxxii. 3-5.

⁴ 1 Chron. xiii., xv.

⁵ 1 Chron. xiii. 1-3.

while laying aside his kingly garments, and adopting a priestly white ephod, he danced for joy before the ark. His former sorrows come to his mind, and he exclaims, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing : Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness."¹ So, with priests, Levites, and singers, the king of Israel ascended to that rocky citadel so lately in possession of the heathen. Already in his mind it is Jehovah's own home. "Arise, O Lord," he cries, "into Thy rest, Thou and the ark of Thy strength ;"² and he bids the very gates lift up their heads that the King of Glory may come in.³ Could any think that he meant to call himself now in the full glory of his new kingdom by this title? Nay, it is "Jehovah strong and mighty," worshipped now in this age of victories by the new name of Lord of Hosts (Jehovah-Tsebaoth). It was the greatest day of David's life ; yet one shade fell upon it. Michal, the wife of his youth, saw in it nothing of its high meaning, but a mere degradation of the office of the king. Such a separation in inward feeling could but be followed by a more outward separation ; Michal ceases from this time to stand by David's side in the story of his life.

The bringing up of the ark and the consequent sanctifying of Jerusalem connects itself with the conquest of the city. But between these two events probably took place David's two victories over the Philistines which are recorded in 2 Sam. v. He was victorious from this time in all his wars, and the contrast is very striking between the order and vigour of these early years of the monarchy and the disunion which led to continual servitudes in the times of the Judges.

¹ Psal. xxx. 11.² Psal. cxxxiii.³ Psal. xxiv.

Victories over the Moabites and Ammonites on the east of Jordan, the Philistines on the west coast, Edomites in the south, and even over the Syrians of Damascus, follow one another in rapid succession. "All at once," it has been said, "Israel had become the great power in Western Asia." The spoils of conquest and the tributes from surrounding nations caused wealth quickly to flow in, and already the gold and the brass used in such quantities in the next reign begin to accumulate. The chief men and officers of the state are regularly appointed; Joab is captain of the host, Benaiah over the body-guard of Cherethites and Pelethites, who appear to have been foreigners, possibly Philistines who had entered David's service. There are what we should call civil and ecclesiastical offices also; a recorder and a scribe or secretary; priests, Levites, and singers, appointed for the service before the ark.

So were fulfilled most literally the words of Balaam, "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly."¹ In David's mind the star that rose, the sceptre that bore rule, was ever something more than the brightness of his own glory, the power of his own victories. The unseen Ruler was to him the true King of Israel, and as he sat in the gorgeous palace which the Tyrian king had built him, his heart was grieved at the contrast of its magnificence with that of the tent which he had made for the ark.² What he had done could but be temporary; the sanctuary was still divided, for the ark was in Zion, the ancient taber-

¹ Numb. xxiv. 17, 18.

² 2 Sam. vii.; 1 Chron. xvii.

nacle at Gibeon, to which it seems to have been moved from Nob. While Israel was but a wandering people, a tent might be their fitting place of worship, but it was very near to David's heart to raise one permanent sanctuary, more beautiful than any palace, to the King of kings.

Nathan's message to him forbade his carrying out this scheme himself; he had been a man of war, and the idea of peace, of Shiloh, must not be dis-severed from the building of God's house. But his desire did not go unrewarded. A new revelation is made to him concerning the promised Seed. The establishment of the kingdom had unfolded the idea of royalty to the Israelites, but now David is expressly told that the kingdom and the throne shall be established for ever, and that his own seed shall inherit it. Whatever iniquity may afterwards be committed or punishment deserved, that royalty shall not pass from David's house as it had done from Saul's; and the house which he so desired to build shall be built by those that come after him. At this time it does not seem that David was told in which of his sons this promise would be fulfilled. Like Abraham, he may have expected that his first-born, or his darling Absalom, would be the chosen one. But the promise filled him with awe and rapture. His own elevation from the sheep-fold to the throne seemed in comparison a small thing.¹ The thought that Israel should for ever be a people, that a righteous kingdom should always stand, and that his children should be those who should maintain it, was to him far more than that his own glory and state should be secured. As he lived on and thought more of this

¹ 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19.

promise, deeper views with regard to it seem to have arisen in his mind, convictions that no mere line of earthly sovereigns could truly fulfil its whole meaning. There are many indications of this in his Psalms ; perhaps the best example may be found in *Psa. cx.* The offspring of David is there represented as partner of the might and the dominion of the Almighty ; his rule extends itself from David's new capital of Zion ; his people will pay to him, not tribute like the Syrians and Moabites, but freewill offerings, and he shall combine in one the offices of the Priest and of the King, as Melchisedec, the former ruler of this newly-possessioned Jerusalem, had done. This vision is clearly a revelation of something greater even than the continuance of David's own office. It became a difficulty that could not be explained to the Pharisees of later days when they strove to narrow the promises of the kingdom to a mere literal fulfilment :¹ it was at length unfolded fully in the words, " This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God ; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool."²

¹ *Matt. xxii. 41-46.*

² *Heb. x. 12, 13.*

LESSON X.

THE REIGN OF DAVID—*continued.*

DAVID'S rule over the united kingdom of Judah and Israel lasted for thirty-three years,¹ of which the first ten seem to have been years of continued prosperity and success. He had indeed lost the early friends of his youth, but he cherished near him the son and servants of Jonathan ; and Nathan and Gad, the prophets of the Lord, stood by his throne as Samuel would fain have stood by that of Saul. Dark clouds and storms of trouble, however, afflicted the latter part of his reign, and it was his own sin that brought this on him.

When we read the shameful story of David's great crime,² with all the sickening details which are so unflinchingly narrated by the sacred historian, we are tempted to feel, as David did at Nathan's story, that the man who had done that thing was worthy to die. Yet the story, common enough as a description of the crime of an Eastern monarch, is almost without a parallel in its subsequent details. The boldness of the prophet in reproving the king had been equalled by Samuel's words to Saul, and was repeated again when

¹ 2 Sam. v. 5.

² 2 Sam. xi.

John the Baptist reproved Herod. But it is rare indeed to find the king neither making the excuses of Saul, nor taking the revenge of Herod, but uttering at once the simple words, "I have sinned against the Lord." The Psalms of David may supply us with some explanation of this. We must remember that though fallen, this man, who had throughout his life lived in continual communion with God, could not now sever himself from it,—could not bear to exist and enjoy the fruits of sin deprived of the rapture of the Divine intercourse.

"When I kept silence," he says, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand is heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer."¹ As a commentator² on this Psalm has expressed it: "The more he strove against confessing, the louder did conscience speak; and while it was not in his power to silence this inward voice, in which the wrath of God found utterance, he cried the whole day, viz. for help; but while his heart was still unbroken, he cried, yet received no answer." The heart was broken however by the prophet's words, and bowed itself in utter humility beneath his reproof; with marvellous clearness he recognised that the sin before God was the great overwhelming stain, so great as to outweigh all other debts, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight,"³ he exclaims, and perceives as none of his race had ever done before the powerlessness of costly sacrifices to atone for such a crime. "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God

¹ Psa. xxxii.² Delitzsch.³ Psa. li.

are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Throughout his life we have seen that David rose above his age in the spiritual interpretation that he put on the ceremonial law, but so clear an insight as this, which has given words to the sighs of many a returning penitent, could only have arisen from the depths of such a repentance.

He was forgiven, but he was not the less punished; all the weight of the sentence pronounced against him fell on his head, and he accepted it, not only without murmuring, but without ever doubting God's forgiveness. He never expected pardon to mean remission of punishment, and he never valued the pardon less because he suffered. He reckoned himself "blessed," because "his transgression was forgiven;"¹ but, when the Lord struck his little child with sickness that it died, he "came into the house of the Lord and worshipped;"² when forced as a fugitive to flee from that city which he had conquered and sanctified, he said, "Here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him;" when Shimei cursed him, he repressed the anger of Abishai with the words, "So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David."³

But not the less did David suffer under the severity of his afflictions. His heart was ever full of love to others; passionate in all his attachments, he who in his youth had felt Jonathan's love to pass the love of women, now in his older years poured out his whole affection upon his children. He fasted and wept for the little infant stricken with sickness; he "mourned every day" for his first-born Amnon; he could not displease the goodly Adonijah; he knew not how to live

¹ *Psa.* xxxii. 1.² *2 Sam.* xii. 20, xv.³ *2 Sam.* xvi. 10.

without Absalom.¹ Back from banishment he willingly brought him, his soul longing to go forth unto him;² but it was only to meet with ingratitude and treachery. This best-beloved and most beautiful of David's children was the one through whose instrumentality the punishment was to be accomplished. As the king passed into exile, weeping as he crossed Olivet,³ the most bitter thought was that one, "My son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more now may this Benjamite do it?"⁴ Yet rising as ever above superstition, he forbade the ark to be brought and used as a charm for safety, or taken into battle⁵ as once before by Hophni and Phinehas. With the desire that the Church of God should remain settled, however much he himself might wander, he sent back both the priests and the ark to the city which he called God's habitation. Then followed the three months of exile on the other side of Jordan, and at length the crushing news of the death of his unworthy but much loved son. His return to Jerusalem succeeded; but it was a mournful return, embittered by feelings of increased hatred to Joab, the murderer of his son, by fresh feuds and murders among his nearest attendants and relations, by a new Benjamite conspiracy, and by the ominous quarrel between Judah and the rest of Israel,⁶ which seemed the prelude to a new disruption of the kingdom. The success of Absalom's conspiracy is perhaps partly accounted for by Nathan's words to David: "By this deed thou hast given great

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 16, xiii. 37; 1 Kings i. 6; 2 Sam. xiii. 39.

² 2 Sam. xiv. 1, 21, 33.

³ 2 Sam. xv. 30.

⁴ 2 Sam. xvi. 11.

⁵ 2 Sam. xv. 24-29.

⁶ 2 Sam. xix. 13; 1 Kings ii. 5; 2 Sam. xx. 1-13, xix. 41-43.

occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." The good principle, the fear of the Lord, had been enthroned in the person of the king, but "wicked doers" were not yet "cut off from the city of the Lord;"² there were many who, terrified at the righteous vigour of the king, gloried in his fall from holiness, and had gladly seized the opportunity to throw off his yoke. Yet it was but for a time. The king could still command the allegiance and "bow the heart"³ of the better sort among his people.

Other calamities however overshadowed the remainder of his reign. It is impossible to fix the date of the three years' famine which afflicted the land in consequence of Saul's conduct to the Gibeonites;³ in that matter David was guiltless. It was otherwise with the pestilence which followed his numbering of the people. The writer of the Book of Kings tells us that the Lord moved David to this act; while in the Chronicles it is said that Satan provoked David.⁴ God permitted Satan's temptation of David, as He did his temptation of Job; and David fell under the temptation. In his youth he had trusted always in the deliverance of the Lord. Now the thought of the great numbers that he could assemble in his army, the great increase of military power, which gave promise of future conquests, lifted up his heart in pride; and he desired to leave a record of what he had achieved in enrolling so many together. The pride of heart was punished immediately; but the voice of Gad, as earlier that of Nathan, sufficed to rouse David from his sin, even before the punishment fell. His desire to "fall into the hand of the Lord" shews the

² Psa. ci.³ 2 Sam. xviii. 14.³ 2 Sam. xxi. 1.⁴ 2 Sam. xxiv. 1; 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

return to trust and dependence on the Unseen which for a time had been obscured ; with love which reminds us of Moses' yearnings over the people, he prays that the punishment may fall on him rather than on them ; and with something of that feeling which so many years before had caused him to pour out the precious water of the well of Bethlehem before the Lord, he exclaims, " Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing."

The many sorrows of David's heart found expression in the Psalms, in which he held close commune with God. Inspired by the Spirit of God, the words in which he expressed his sorrow contained a fulness of meaning which he himself perhaps scarcely grasped. As it has been said, " exercised and proved by the cross," he was " the first to introduce to the knowledge of the Church a suffering Messiah."¹ Sorrow is raised and dignified, and thus the way is as it were prepared for a further and later revelation ; that of the Messiah, king, priest, and prophet, being also the Victim and Sufferer.

David's own life and character tended to teach a further knowledge of the Seed Who was to come, but the great growth in the knowledge of his time sprang from the clear light thrown on the kingly office, and the position of " the Lord's anointed," joined with Nathan's distinct promise that this office should continue in David's line, and that of his kingdom there should be no end.² The hopes of the people were henceforth centred in one single family. We have seen

¹ HENGSTENBERG'S *Christology of the Old Testament*.

² See the great prophecy of 2 Sam. vii. 12-14, referred to in Heb. i. 5 and Isa. lv. 3—the key to many of the Psalms.

that David probably did not know at first in which of his sons this promise should be fulfilled; but before his death a further revelation was granted to him. When his youngest son was born¹ he gave to him the name "Solomon," or "the peaceful one," remembering doubtless that he who was to be the future builder of God's house must not be "a man of war."² But at some future time it had been clearly made known, that this youngest son was to be the future king.³ As in the case of the two sons of Isaac and Rebecca, it was the younger who was to rule the elder. In this son, so young and tender, "whom alone," as he said, "God hath chosen,"⁴ David rested all the hopes of the close of his life. He saw in him the peaceful successor who should unite the kingdom, and build that house of God for which he himself was only worthy to make preparation. He commanded that Solomon should be anointed even before his own death, and he put down all rebellion against him.⁵ And kindling at the hope of a glorious future, he seemed to return back in spirit to the times of the first conquest, and spoke of "possessing this good land, and leaving it for an inheritance;"⁶ while his charge to Solomon echoes again the words of Moses to Joshua, "Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed." In his "last words" "the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel," uttered with all the fervour of his youth his praise and faith in God, and with only a passing allusion to his sorrows rested on the remembrance of special promise made to him; "Yet He hath made

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 24.³ 1 Chron. xxviii. 5, 6.⁵ 1 Kings i. 34, 43.² 1 Chron. xxviii. 3.⁴ 1 Chron. xxix. 1.⁶ 1 Chron. xxviii. 8, 20.

with me an everlasting covenant." ¹ He "slept with his fathers," ² and as the Apostle Peter said ³ long afterwards, "his sepulchre is with us unto this day." But his hopes did not end with his life here. A first gleam of a faith and hope in another world shewed itself in his words when his child was taken from him, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me;" ⁴ a trust in a yet greater resurrection appeared in his prophetic Psalms. ⁵

"Therefore," says St. Peter, "being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption." ⁶

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

² 1 Kings ii. 10.

³ Acts ii. 29.

⁴ 2 Sam. xii. 23.

⁵ Psa. xvi. 8-11.

⁶ Acts ii. 30, 31.

LESSON XI.

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON.

IT is not perfectly clear at what time the Lord made known to David in which of his sons the promise with regard to the succession should be fulfilled. Before the birth of Solomon a revelation of his future greatness was given,¹ and at his birth his names bore witness to the position that he was to occupy. God's prophet Nathan called him Jedidiah, "the darling of Jehovah;" with a still deeper prophetic insight his father named him Solomon, "the peaceful one." He remembered that he himself, because he was a man of war, was forbidden to build the Temple, and with a feeling rare in times of warfare, the successful warrior gloried in the thought that his son should be a Prince of peace, and thus entitled to build a house for Jehovah.

From his earliest years this thought was held up to Solomon as the ideal of what he was to become. Above all, during his childhood the preparations for the building which he was to raise after his father's death were continually before him; and his after-history shews what deep meaning he attached to this work. Later in life, Solomon looked back to his father's teaching

¹ 1 Chron. xxii. 9.

as his chief guide,¹ and placed before all other earthly helps the training of holy parents. He was still very young when the insurrection of his elder brother Adonijah hastened his public recognition as king even before his father's death.

"I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother;"² "Solomon, my son, is young and tender."³ These are the only words of love and tenderness that we can find relating to the majestic king who, unequalled in his greatness, seems almost unequalled in his loneliness. Unlike his father, unlike even the first erring king of Israel, Solomon with all his magnificence never apparently inspired love. He commenced his reign with the stern suppression of rebellion and the execution (whether immediately or shortly after) of all those who had been leaders of it. This severity was probably necessary to the ensuring of his own peaceful accession, and to the security of the kingdom. It is evident that the rebellion was carried on in known violation of the choice of the future king indicated both by the Word of God and of the late king David. Now we are told, God's word against Eli's house was fully accomplished, when Abiathar, his last descendant, was thrust out from being priest; now at length the vengeance of God fell on Joab, the murderer of Abner and of Amasa.⁴ Yet over the defection of this last the sacred historian seems to mourn, perhaps remembering the days when Joab's activity scaled the rocky defences of Jerusalem. "Though he turned not after Absalom," he had turned after Adonijah.

The suppression of rebellion confirmed the whole

¹ Prov. iv. 4-6, vi. 20-22.

² Prov. iv. 3.

³ 1 Chron. xxix. 1.

⁴ 1 Kings ii. 27, 32, 28.

kingdom in Solomon's possession; it was now a united kingdom, but it had not yet one permanent centre of worship. David had sanctified Jerusalem by the bringing up of the ark, and had appointed priests and Levites to minister continually before it; but he had also appointed a similar service to be ordered before the ancient tabernacle which now stood at Gibeon.¹ Before it still stood the brazen altar of burnt-offering, which Joab vainly hoped might afford him the privileges of sanctuary;² and the place was still reckoned so holy that it was called "the great high place."³ Inheriting this state of things, it was no sin in Solomon that he "sacrificed and burnt incense in high places;"⁴ he did but continue the arrangements made by his father until the building of the Temple should establish one sacred place for the whole nation. Early in his reign accordingly we find him presenting his offerings before the sacred tent at Gibeon, and there with the actual tabernacle of Moses before him, reminding him of the early wanderings of his nation, the first direct communication from God came to him. Several times in his life did Solomon receive some direct word from God, which, though given in a vision or dream, was to him a distinct revelation. This first time, in the days of his glorious youth, the vision was accompanied by the great gift which distinguished his life.

Let us not miss the stress laid in the narrative upon the *choice* of Solomon. He desired the gift of wisdom before he was specially endowed with it, it was his choice before all things; and the choice "pleased the Lord." Yet good as the choice was, and amply as it was re-

¹ 1 Chron. xvi. 4-6, 37-40.

³ 1 Kings iii. 4.

² 1 Kings ii. 28.

⁴ 1 Kings iii. 3.

warded, it was not perhaps the very highest imaginable. We can scarcely believe that even a Divine wisdom by which he might judge his people would have been the choice of David. To possess, or rather be utterly possessed by, the "free Spirit" of God, was the uppermost thought of the father's mind; to be so guided by it as to rule all men well was the desire of the son. The wish was amply granted; the wisdom given was not mere worldly prudence, but a true insight into knowledge of all kinds, imparted by God's Spirit. It was as truly a heavenly gift as the strength of Samson or the prophetic power of Samuel. And it began to shew itself at once. From Gibeon the king returned to Jerusalem, and offered his sacrifices at the other great high place, before the ark. During the great feast which he then held, the young monarch was called on to give a judgment in a case of difficulty.² At once he applied the test supplied by a knowledge of human nature, and reached the truth through it. But this one instance which we possess of Solomon's mode of judgment by no means represents all that we know of his wisdom. Emphatically "the wise man" of his time, the heavenly gift which he possessed shewed itself more particularly in three directions; namely, *Judgment, Knowledge and Government.*

With regard to the first of these we may remark the exalted view of *judgment* and doing justice which he took. The judges who went before him appear to have been more governed by feeling, more apt to say at once with David on hearing of a crime, "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die." With Solomon we meet with the calm judicial temper, and with a desire to

² 1 Kings iii. 15-28.

sift evidence and quietly arrive at truth. It was to him the highest function of the king. "A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment," he says, "scattereth away all evil with his eyes."¹ And again, "The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever."² And in the Psalm which we may reckon perhaps as the highest strain of poetry which he ever uttered, it is the prevailing thought, "Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment."³ This Psalm expresses a higher view of justice than could ever be fully realized by a mortal man, and thus prepares the way for a belief in Him Who was to be the Judge of all the earth.

Solomon's wisdom displayed itself, secondly, in *knowledge*. Of his nation he is the first who appears to have studied nature scientifically. David's Psalms prove his intense enjoyment of it, but Solomon possessed a real knowledge which was unequalled in his time. "He spake of trees from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes."⁴ As he looked on the "creeping things," and watched the industry of the ants, the lesson occurred to him which applied to the wasteful man, careless of his time;⁵ when he made him "pools of water it was to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees,"⁶ and to bring by means of

¹ Prov. xx. 8.

² Prov. xxix. 14.

³ Psa. lxxii. 1, 2. The words at the head of this Psalm should be translated "A Psalm of Solomon."

⁴ 1 Kings iv. 33.

⁵ Prov. vi. 6-11.

⁶ Eccles. ii. 6.

an aqueduct the water freely to the growing capital. These pools and his gardens are still to be seen by travellers, but the husbandry by which he strove to improve the land has vanished. Yet we know how he valued it from his advice to others to "know the state of their flocks," from the thoughts suggested to him by the sight of "the hay appearing, the tender grass shewing itself."¹ But though these useful purposes occurred to him, his love for the beauty of nature is not less than that of his father. He desired that the cornfields of his country should rustle like those cedars of Lebanon of which he could speak so well,² but he rejoiced also in the beauty of the cedars themselves and the streams which descended from the hills on which they grew.³ Of all his songs but one is left to us, that which we call the "Song of Solomon." It was probably written in his early youth, and there have been many questions and different opinions raised on its full meaning. One thing however is clear and apparent, the writer of it intensely loved the nature by which he was surrounded, it breathes throughout a spirit of youth and spring, a joy that "the winter is past," that "the time of the singing of birds is come."⁴ This knowledge of nature was a part of his wisdom, and it differed from that of the wise of Egypt and of the East⁵ in a most vital manner. They knew perhaps as much of nature as he did, but their very knowledge was a snare to them; the water of the Nile to an Egyptian was not God's gift but God Himself, the bull, the ibis or sacred bird, all were sharers of the Divine nature. To Solomon they were the creatures and works of the Creator, and his admiration of

¹ Prov. xxvii. 23-27.² Psa. lxxii. 16.³ S. of Solomon iv. 8, 15.⁴ Song of Solomon ii. 11-13.⁵ 1 Kings iv. 30, 31.

them drew from him the words, "He hath made every thing beautiful in His time."¹ The very foundation and beginning of his knowledge was "the fear of the Lord."²

But beside judgment and knowledge, Solomon's wisdom was also mightily shown in *government*. He was born to be a Prince of peace, and he valued peace as no king before him had done; until the later and sadder years of his life, peace, plenty and prosperity were the characteristics of his reign. "Judah and Israel were many, eating and drinking and making merry," they "dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree."³ And now began to flourish the arts of peace, commerce and trade. These Solomon had so much at heart that he journeyed himself to the shores of the Red Sea to encourage them,⁴ and under his rule the Israelites first became a maritime people, and possessed two navies, one for Western, the other for Eastern traffic. To strengthen the peace and aid the commerce of his extended empire, Solomon entered into relations and made treaties with many surrounding nations. With the king of Egypt, whose daughter he married,⁵ and with Hiram, king of Tyre, his father's friend,⁶ he was allied, and the immediate results of the peace of his country and of his foreign alliances were a splendour and magnificence which had hitherto been unseen in Israel. His palace, his throne, the vessels which he used, the state that he maintained, were a world's wonder; his people marvelled at the strange animals, the precious spices, the precious stones (so often mentioned by him),⁷ the silver and the gold made

¹ Eccles. iii. 11.² Prov. i. 7.³ 1 Kings iv. 20, 25.⁴ 2 Chron. viii. 17.⁵ 1 Kings iv. 1.⁶ 1 Kings v. 1-12.⁷ Prov. iii. 14, 15, xx. 15.

by him so plentiful. The magnificence of Solomon became a proverb, and was unrivalled in the Jewish annals. It was used to convey a lesson by Him Whose justice was not administered after the sight of His eyes,¹ Whose dominion was truly "unto the ends of the earth,"² "in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."³ Pointing to the colours of the flowers of the field, colours which no art of man can ever fully reproduce, He said to those around that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.⁴

¹ Isa. xi. 3.

² Psa. lxxii. 8.

³ Col. ii. 3.

⁴ Matt. vi. 29.

LESSON XII.

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON—*Continued.*

IF the greatest day of David's life was that on which he brought up the Ark of God to Zion, with joy and thankfulness at the visible sign of God's presence in his newly conquered city, the most memorable day to Solomon was certainly that on which he dedicated the completed Temple to Jehovah. It had been the great thought of his youth, the thing which, we may almost say, he felt himself born to do. His father had made great preparation for it, and the spot where it should be built had been indicated by the building of that altar which was raised on the purchased threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Here David had sacrificed, and had already called the place "the house of the Lord."¹

Solomon continued the preparations, and in the fourth year of his reign began the building. It took seven years to build, and was completed in the eleventh year of his reign.² It was not however apparently dedicated until the king had finished all the buildings on which he was engaged, one of which was his own palace.

¹ 1 Chron. xxii. 2-5, xxi. 28-30, xxii. 1; 2 Chron. iii. 1.

² 1 Kings vi. 37, 38.

This work occupied him for thirteen more years, so that the great day of dedication took place probably in the twenty-fourth year of his reign.¹ While it was in building a direct communication from God to Solomon took place, a message full of encouragement as to the work on which he was engaged. The Feast of Tabernacles was the time chosen by Solomon for the great day of dedication, when a large number of people were certain to be assembled at Jerusalem, which had become the place to which "the tribes went up"² to keep the three great feasts of the year. Henceforth the Temple at Jerusalem was to be the central seat of worship, the great house of prayer to all the people. The two services hitherto maintained, one at Gibeon, the other before the ark on Mount Zion, were now to be joined, and accordingly we find that the priests brought up both "the ark of the Lord and the tabernacle of the congregation,"³ that they might find their resting-place for ever together. This is not the only proof of the care with which the Temple and its services were shewn to be no new kind of worship, but a continuation and perfecting of the old. The building itself displayed it. It was in plan and arrangement an exact reproduction of the tabernacle, with only these two differences—its dimensions were exactly double those of the tabernacle, and it was a building, a "settled place," and not a moveable tent. The Temple itself was, according to our ideas, a very small building, smaller than the average size of a parish church. But it was looked on by the Jews as an inner sanctuary; and for purposes of worship the outer courts

¹ 1 Kings vi. 11-13, vii. 1, viii. 1, ix. 1, 2.

² Psa. cxxii. 4.

³ 1 Kings viii. 4.

which surrounded the Temple were all considered a part of it. On the eastern side of the rocky platform, which had been Araunah's threshing-floor, rose a colonnade to which the name of "Solomon's Porch"¹ was given, a name which still clung to the spot many long years afterwards. Within this was the outer court, where it is thought by some that trees were planted, those "green olive trees"² which are spoken of as being in "the house of God." This court was open to all; but within was a smaller one, the court of the priests, which was surrounded by chambers, where they lived. Here stood the great altar of burnt-offering, where the sacrifices were offered; and within this court were the great brazen sea, and ten lesser vessels for washing. On the western side of this inner court, facing the east, rose the Temple itself. It had in the front a lofty porch, in which respect it differed from the arrangements of the tabernacle. The space in front of the porch, between it and the great altar, was deemed especially sacred to the priests.³ The building erected was not so high as the porch itself, and had a sloping tent-like roof resembling the tabernacle. Underneath the porch stood two pillars, called Jachin and Boaz. Within it a pair of folding-doors led into the Holy Place. Ten seven-branched candlesticks (instead of one) stood on tables within the Holy Place; here also was the table for the shewbread, and the golden altar of incense. Within this again, divided from it by folding-doors, over which hung the sacred veil, was the Holy of Holies, into which none but the high-priest penetrated, and he only once a year. Into this inmost chamber the ark was now brought, the staves that bore it being withdrawn

¹ John x. 23; Acts iii. 11.² Psa. lii. 8.³ Joel ii. 17.

in token that it had found its resting-place. There was nothing in the ark, we are told, but the two tables of stone which Moses had put there;¹ the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks indeed also of the golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod,² but these must either have been destroyed during the time that the Philistines had possession of the ark or were placed elsewhere by Solomon.

While the priests bore the ark into the Holy of Holies, the king and the people waited outside, in the inner court, where was a brazen scaffold erected for the king. The priests returned, and joined by the Levites and the singers, raised the strain so familiar in Israel,—“He is good, His mercy endureth for ever.” At that moment the bright cloud, the sign and pledge of God's immediate presence, that cloud which had rested on and filled the tabernacle when first it was reared up by Moses,³ appeared and filled the newly completed house. And then the king commenced that solemn prayer which has ever since seemed the most appropriate that can be used on any similar occasion in the Christian Church. The king himself was the chief minister of this service, and this fact suggests to us how highly his office was esteemed both by himself and by his people. It was the king who blessed the people, and the king who prayed, though he did not usurp the priest's office and enter the Holy of Holies. The most sublime thoughts were in his mind: thankfulness that he had finished this his special work, remembrance of that promise made by God concerning David's son, desire that it might be fulfilled to the utmost in himself, and, rarest and most sublime of all,

¹ 1 Kings viii. 9.² Heb. ix. 4.³ Exod. xl. 34.

a full recognition that the presence of Jehovah could not be bounded by space, that God could be in this house that He had built and everywhere besides. "Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" "The most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." The thought was the same, whether expressed by the great king of Israel on his day of triumph or uttered by the first Christian martyr immediately before his death.¹

Seven distinct petitions followed these words, all of which had reference to the Temple. These were, first, for the protection of the sacredness of oaths; second, for deliverance from an enemy on confession of sin; third, for deliverance from drought; fourth, for deliverance from plague; fifth, for the development of the knowledge of God among strangers; sixth, for success against an enemy; seventh, a special prayer for captives. The fifth of these petitions shews strikingly Solomon's feeling for strangers, the seventh almost appears to prophesy the future captivity of his own nation.

With renewed blessing, words of warning and sacrifices, the service ended, and a feast of fourteen days followed. As the bringing up of the ark to Zion shewed forth the joyfulness of David, so the scene of the dedication of the Temple equally displayed the majesty of Solomon. But great as was the material splendour of the scene, it was outweighed, as has been said, by "the religious grandeur of the hymns and of the prayer; the exalted and rational views of the Divine Nature; the union of a whole people in the adoration

¹ Acts vii. 48.

of the One Great, Incomprehensible, Almighty, Everlasting Creator."¹

The dedication was followed by the next communication which Solomon received from God, in which God's favour was again promised on the same conditions as before.² "If ye shall at all turn from following Me, and go and serve other gods, and worship them." The words must have sounded strangely at such a time, but the after-history of Solomon sadly recalls them to mind. The Temple, and the various other buildings raised in Jerusalem, the foreign cities built, and the increase of the territory and of the commerce of the Israelites, greatly increased the fame of Solomon. From all surrounding countries visitors came to see his magnificence, and still more to hear his wisdom.³ Among these was the Queen of Sheba,⁴ a princess probably from Arabia; of whom our Blessed Lord remarked that her desire to hear the wisdom of Solomon put to shame the indifference of that generation to whom a greater than Solomon was sent.⁵ The expression used, "She came to prove him with hard questions," means rather she came to propose riddles, or to discuss proverbs with him. For proverbs or parables (for the word is nearly the same) Solomon was especially renowned. We are told that he spake three thousand of them,⁶ of which a large number are preserved to us in the Book of Proverbs. If the Song of Solomon gives us some glimpse of the brightness of his youth, the Book of Proverbs represents to us the practical life of his middle age. And the special char-

¹ DEAN MILMAN'S *History of the Jews*.

³ 1 Kings x. 24.

⁴ 1 Kings x. 1-13.

⁶ 1 Kings iv. 32.

² 1 Kings ix. 1-9.

⁵ Matt. xii. 42.

acteristics of Solomon's wisdom are plainly shewn in it ; no book in the Bible gives a more discriminating, we might almost say, judicial view of human character. Above all, no book so clearly sets forth that vice is folly, and virtue wisdom. The proverbs are as characteristic of the times in which Solomon lived as of his special wisdom. It has been remarked, that if sacred lyrics or psalms are often produced in times of war, only in times of peace will proverbs be written.¹

Had Solomon's reign ended soon after he dedicated the Temple it would have been one of unclouded brightness. But it lasted for forty years, and the latter part was overclouded by the very sins from which we might have expected the king's gift of wisdom would most have protected him. But God's gifts never control the will, and Solomon's will was not one with God's.

Three forms of sin are noticeable in Solomon's last days. His rule began to be oppressive, a "grievous yoke ;"² *second*, the polygamy in which his father had indulged was carried to a far greater extent by Solomon, and he chose his wives from those nations with whom marriage was forbidden by the law ; *thirdly*, and as a direct consequence from such marriages, he allowed the practice of idolatry. We need not suppose that Solomon worshipped false gods himself ; it is enough that on the Mount of Olives, over against the Temple he had built, rose by his permission temples to many false gods, and that while on one side of the deep ravine of the Kedron the praises of Jehovah sounded, on the other were performed the impure rites of heathen

¹ HENGSTENBERG'S *Kingdom of God under the Old Testament*,

² 1 Kings xii. 4.

deities. For the last time in his life Solomon received a direct word from God;² but this time not in favour. A judgment resembling that pronounced on Saul was delivered; the kingdom should be rent from Solomon. Yet was not the promise to David forgotten; a remnant should be left to his line for David's sake and for Jerusalem's sake.

It has been remarked that no great prophet is spoken of as living during the reign of Solomon. But the explanation of this seems easy. The king's wondrous gift of wisdom rendered him prophet as well as king to his people; and we see this clearly in the part which he took in the dedication of the Temple and in the messages which he himself received from the Lord, without the interposition of any other prophet. But when he fell, the prophetic gift at once appeared in another, and Ahijah the Shilonite is sent with God's message to Jeroboam.³ In the dark years of the close of his reign many adversaries were raised up against Solomon, and internal discontent took the place of the joy and gladness of his early years. Once more the united kingdom was near division; the newly established centre of worship was soon to have rivals. He saw the change and the decay; he knew even into whose hands the power would fall at his death;⁴ at the age of about fifty-five he appeared old; all his past life, as he mused over it, seemed, in the bitterness of his heart, to have been failure. He remembered his efforts after knowledge and wisdom, his study of human nature, his great works of building and of planting. His

¹ 1 Kings xi. 11-13.

² 1 Kings xi. 29-39.

³ 1 Kings xi. 40.

⁴ 1 Kings xi. 4. Solomon reigned forty years, and was probably about eighteen at his accession.

glory and honour had been the wonder of the world, yet his own sentence on it was contained in the mournful words, "Vanity of vanities ; all is vanity."¹ Was this sad retrospect cheered by any light? were the words of his last days, surely among the saddest that ever fell from human lips, a prelude to repentance? The question cannot be confidently answered : He only to whom the curtain is lifted can tell what the last days and death of the great king were really like, but two passages are left us which afford perhaps a hope that the gloom was lightened at the last. Nehemiah, one of the greater spirits of his nation, in after days expresses thus his judgment : "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel : nevertheless *even him* did outlandish women cause to sin."² And if the king was thus spoken of so long after, the reason for it may perhaps have been suggested by the words accepted as being the last known to have fallen from him :—

"Fear God, and keep His commandments : for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."³

¹ Eccles. i. 2.² Neh. xiii. 26.³ Eccles. xii. 13, 14.







